

LENTEN MEDITATIONS 2017



Episcopal
Relief & Development

Healing a hurting world

Dear Friend in Christ,

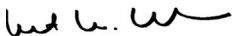
Thank you for joining with Episcopal Relief & Development as we seek a deeper connection to the Christ we encounter in others.

Lent is sometimes seen as a season of prayerful introspection and internal focus. Practices such as silent retreats and fasting can provide a sense of spiritual depth through discipline and solitude. However, even though Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness fasting and being tempted, it would paint an incomplete picture to say he was alone in this endeavor. Not only is it the Spirit who leads Jesus into the wilderness (Matthew 4:1), but during his sojourn Jesus communes with wild beasts and is served by angels (Mark 1:13; Matthew 4:1-11).

In this fourteenth edition of Episcopal Relief & Development's *Lenten Meditations*, we have invited writers to explore what it means to live faithfully in community. What can we do in partnership that we cannot do alone?

We invite you to join us and this community of writers from throughout the world as we encounter this Lenten journey together. Know that you are in our hearts and prayers this season as we invite you to pray for the people we serve and for our staff and friends who commit their lives to healing a hurting world.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert W. Radtke', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert W. Radtke
President, Episcopal Relief & Development



For over 75 years, Episcopal Relief & Development has served as a compassionate response of The Episcopal Church to human suffering in the world. An independent 501(c)(3) organization, it works closely with Anglican Communion and ecumenical partners, helping communities to create long-term development strategies and rebuild after disasters. Using the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework, the agency reaches more than 3 million people in nearly 40 countries each year, through multi-sector programs that fight poverty, hunger and disease.



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Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

—The Book of Common Prayer



ASH WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1

Lent has two quite remarkable bookends. Today, on Ash Wednesday we are reminded that we are dust and that God loves us even in our dustiness. At the end of this season, we will celebrate the power that God's love has to transform this world. Easter reminds us that not even death can keep us from God's unconditional love. As we follow in the footsteps of Jesus this Lent, we know that living out God's love for the world is our ultimate goal.

We also know that this walk with Jesus won't be easy. Following Jesus takes us through Good Friday and the cross. There will be struggles; there will be times when we stumble, but we are not alone. We are bound to one another as children of God. We share with Jesus in God's beloved family.

God came among us in the person of Jesus to show us how to be more than simply the human race. He came to show us how to realize God's dream, God's purpose, God's plan for us and for all creation.

Whatever devotion you practice this season of Lent, either giving up something that ties you to this world or taking on a spiritual task or discipline, let it be something that helps you participate in the movement of God's love in this world, following in the footsteps of Jesus and loving one another.

—Michael Bruce Curry

Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?

—Luke 24:32

THURSDAY, MARCH 2

One of the most painful moments of my working life was making a condolence visit to Anna, a widow in Uganda, who was dying from an AIDS-related illness. Anna knew she had just a few weeks to live and had been preparing her son, James, to take over as head of the family. Anna was investing all her hope in James, a wonderful boy, leader of his church youth group and a musician who played the lyre. Then one day James unexpectedly fell ill and quickly died. His mother was heartbroken. Who would now care for her younger children when she died?

I visited Anna soon after James's death. At that time I was working with a project assisting communities affected by HIV. We sat under the eaves of her thatched hut sheltering from the rain. We cried and prayed together.

In the midst of praying, we both had a sudden sense of our hearts burning within us – a feeling of the Spirit's presence. Other women in the community joined us in prayer. Anna still grieved, but she also felt a comfort in knowing that others would care for her orphans. She was not alone. Our deep anxiety lifted. We all had a sense that together, bound by love and mutual care, we could recover hope. *Were not our hearts burning within us?*

—Rachel Carnegie

*Oh, how good and pleasant it is,
when brethren live together in unity!*

—Psalm 133:1



FRIDAY, MARCH 3

In the days of my childhood, our home was connected to every house on the block. Our block was connected to adjacent streets that brought together houses, corner stores and schools, which made up our neighborhood. During the season of Lent, I am especially reminded of my 1960s neighborhood. On Ash Wednesday, everyone had ashes on their foreheads. In the following weeks, extra effort was made to be in church to pray, fast and give alms. On Fridays, we all ate fish. I felt that each of us – teachers, store clerks, the elderly, parents and small children – were keepers of these forty days and forty nights. These remembrances taught me that my neighborhood was a community of faith.

Our faith teaches that Jesus is Alpha and Omega. Lent is a return to the beginning – and a look to beyond the end. During this unique time, we follow the Way of the Cross. The cross is that unique sign that connects God with the entire world for all time. I give thanks to God for the deep significance of Lent: connection, togetherness, solidarity and hope in Jesus our Redeemer.

—Richard J. Aguilar

He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

—Mark 1:13

SATURDAY, MARCH 4

We know Jesus spent forty days in the desert in fasting and solitude. In today's world, what a concept that would be and believe me, there are times I think how tempting that sounds.

Life as I know it has changed in my fifty-plus years (very low on the plus I might add!). The stresses of our day-to-day lives can take a toll on us and make us want to escape, but forty days might be a bit too long. Scholars tell us that it was when Jesus rejoined civilization that his ministry began.

Not being around family, friends and work colleagues to occupy our time for that period could no doubt take a toll on mind and soul. Being with others hones our human qualities of love, compassion, hope, respect and yes, even forgiveness – all traits that Jesus exemplified in his teachings during his short time on this earth.

How will you enter into your ministry this Lent?

—Mary Carr



SUNDAY, MARCH 5

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer

Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

—The Book of Common Prayer

MONDAY, MARCH 6

There is a ceremony among the Lakota People of South Dakota called the “Hunka” ceremony. Hunka is used as an adoption rite, a public acknowledgment that one has become a brother, a daughter, grandson or just about any form of family relation one can imagine. These adoptions are viewed in the same way as biological family members. The Lakota exercise great devotion to family and make no distinction between close or distant relations. When an individual adopts someone as a brother through the Hunka ceremony, both families become joined as one.

It should come as no surprise that we approach the sacrament of baptism the same way as the Hunka. Jesus adopts the baptismal candidate, becoming our elder brother, and Jesus’ father becomes our father. The new connection goes much deeper: Now all of Jesus’ relatives become our relatives. This includes all Christians – including all of those with whom we may disagree. There may be discord and tensions in all families, but within God’s family, we are called to make peace and to give love no matter how difficult. Together as a family, we can work toward God’s peace and love.

—Paul Sneve

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

—John 13:34



TUESDAY, MARCH 7

Loving one another is a powerful mandate. What I find makes this commandment even more profound is that we are called to love one another as God loves us, unconditionally. Unconditional love is not always easy when the “real world” comes crashing into our lives. How do we lead with love when we experience violence or hate? How do we lead with love when the world is so very challenging? I believe these are the exact moments when our love is most crucial to our communities. Leading with love creates connections and builds relationships. Coming together makes us stronger.

Leading with love, we have the opportunity to impact people – shining light in the darker places. Think of love as candlelight in a dark room. Just as adding more candles brightens a room, so too does the addition of love brighten the world. We can be a part of transforming our neighborhoods, families and ourselves. Together, let’s lead with love.

—Rachel Babbitt

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

—Acts 2:44-45

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8

It might be difficult for Christians today to understand that only a few decades ago, these words from Acts were viewed with some suspicion, as they sounded a bit like Communist propaganda. To the Cold War generation in America, this description of the early believers' communal life was enough to make Christian capitalists quite nervous.

But it is not political ideology that is being promoted in the Acts of the Apostles, but rather a glimpse into what it means to live together in Christ. The beauty – no, the miracle – of what was happening in that first-century community is that a group of otherwise different, diverse people found the grace every day to see Christ in one another and to care for each other as they would wish to be cared for. It was not a state decree that compelled them to share, to give, to be stewards of one another. It was the love of God that inspired them to do so.

The early Church grew not simply because of great preaching or astounding signs, but because people around them noticed with awe that these members of the Jesus Movement truly loved one another. The world could see they were Christians by their love. May it be so today with us.

—C.K. Robertson

We can embrace our humanness, which means embracing our broken natures and the compassion that remains our best hope for healing. Or we can deny our brokenness, forswear compassion, and, as a result, deny our own humanity.

—Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*



THURSDAY, MARCH 9

Embracing brokenness and learning compassion are not easy tasks. While working with people imprisoned on death row and children sentenced to life in prison, lawyer and social justice activist Bryan Stevenson learned that when the brokenness of others meets the brokenness inside you, there are two options: compassionate action or numb neglect.

Compassion is a different kind of knowing: the willingness to let another's pain teach you how to love and work for justice. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians that our actions sound like ugly noises when they are done without love. We cannot love other people until we know and understand their pain.

Often when painful feelings arise, we seek out distraction. This Lent let yourself feel all the emotions, even the unpleasant ones. You are safe, held in the presence of our God who sees, knows and loves you.

Who we love matters. Who we love changes us. Together, we can expand our capacity for compassion and find healing for ourselves and our world.

—Lindsey Briggs

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

—Matthew 18:20

FRIDAY, MARCH 10

As the daughter of a United Church of Christ pastor, I grew up with 250 sets of eyes watching my every triumph and misstep. I didn't want to rebel against God or my parents, but I did want to forge my own identity. Each time I stumbled, I felt like I was letting down my family and my church. Only after I left home and discovered the joy of choosing to seek God did my church community truly become my family. Through working with my church and Episcopal Relief & Development, I have traveled to Israel, Palestine, Myanmar and Cuba. In each place, I discovered the people I met were my family too. I have seen the work being done to overcome poverty, adversity and injustice. I have left these places saying joyfully, "Yes, we can!"

When I was invited to speak at the 150th anniversary of my childhood church, the faces I saw were no longer of my father's church, but rather the faces of my family who nurtured and loved me in spite of my stumbles.

During this time of spiritual introspection and renewal, I invite you to explore how we can reach out to the world – our family. Together, we are stronger, more resilient and able to create positive change. Together, we can help heal a hurting world.

—Sharon Hilpert

*For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field,
God's building.*

—1 Corinthians 3:9



SATURDAY, MARCH 11

Paul tells us we are God's field, and we are God's building. Agriculture and architecture are two things I deal with a lot in my role as a Partner in Response for Episcopal Relief & Development's US Disaster Program.

In Vermont after Tropical Storm Irene, I talked to farmers about land that had been swept away by fast-moving rivers. Those lands, now part of the river, had been grazing pastures for flocks or fields of organic produce. In Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Texas, North Dakota and New Jersey, floods took houses off slabs and piers off foundations. Everybody knows a house is much more than a structure. Can we take away the pain and grief of people who have lost their homes or livelihoods? No, not completely. A good friend once told me, "We are not called to success; we are called to be faithful."

God does not cause this pain, this heartache, but in the words of a Bonnie Raitt song, "God Was in the Water." God invites us to act as God's hands and feet, to be in the water too, and gives us opportunities to be faithful. God invites us into transformation – building the fields, constructing the buildings. God is growing and building all of it in grace.

—Elaine Clements





SUNDAY, MARCH 12

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

—Ephesians 2:14

MONDAY, MARCH 13

For nearly ten years, I have led groups on pilgrimage through the Holy Land. One of the most profound parts of these trips is visiting the security wall that separates the West Bank from Israel. This physical barrier, with its massive 20-foot-high concrete sections, reminds me of the physical barriers as well as the social, economic, cultural, ethnic and prejudicial barriers that keep people apart.

On a recent trip, as we were praying at the wall, one of the young people in my group tearfully asked, “Why does it have to be this way?” Indeed that is the question. The answer is: “It doesn’t!”

What would our world look like if the first thing we saw in one another was not the color of our skin, our position in life, our wealth or our orientation, but the face of Jesus Christ? How might this attitude guide us in living together in community?

We live in a hurting and broken world. But together, by loving our neighbor, striving for peace and justice and respecting the dignity of every human being, we can break down the walls that separate us from each other and from God’s love.

—Edward J. Konieczny

*He revives my soul
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.*

—Psalm 23:3



TUESDAY, MARCH 14

Sometimes you have to just stop and listen. I reached one of those points after several grueling months of makeshift housing after a succession of hurricanes and tornadoes. My church was destroyed, and the hospital building where I worked was decimated.

One day, I borrowed a truck and drove several hours to an unaffected area, found an Episcopal church, sat alone in a pew and prayed. I became aware of a woman walking the labyrinth. Eventually, I entered it as well and made my way around the path. The bright sun struck my eyes, and I was not able to see the markings on the path as I began my way out from the center. Lost, I glanced up and there, several turns away, was the woman. Her presence enabled me to determine the direction to take. In that moment, I realized I was not alone, I wasn't lost; there were others on the path I could lean on for help. I was able to return to the work of rebuilding a community alongside a wonderful, dedicated staff.

Today, I serve in a parish with a grass labyrinth. As I walk and pray there, I recall the woman from that day who reminded me that we are not alone, that God is here and that if we listen for the Spirit, we can find our way out of the tragedy.

—Elizabeth Jay Jordan

If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

—Isaiah 58:10-11

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

My first pastoral visits as bishop of Toungoo took twenty-one days to walk to three parishes. During these visits, I discovered that there was no proper education for children and no proper health care for anyone. Women and girls hauled water over long distances daily. Families already struggling for daily sustenance were often displaced because of armed conflict or the building of a dam. As their shepherd, I felt guilty that I could not provide for their basic needs.

Children were hungry for education. People were hungry for health care and thirsty for clean water. Families were hungry for a living wage. How could we serve them? Our diocese could only provide so much, but God works in mysterious ways. Partnering with Episcopal Relief & Development, we have been able to provide emergency relief for displaced families, education for children, health care for villagers, fresh water for everyone and microfinancing to enable families to earn a living wage. God is good.

Isaiah says that helping the hungry and the needy is pleasing to God. Who are the hungry and suffering around us? There are families who lack food, who are homeless or victims of natural and human-made disasters and who are sick. Together, we can serve them through the guidance of the living God.

—John Wilme

*All people are children when they sleep.
There's no war in them then.*

**—When They Sleep by Rolf Jacobsen
Translated by Robert Hedin**



THURSDAY, MARCH 16

Everywhere I visited as an international public health worker, women were eager for new ways to protect their children. In 2004, on my last trip to West Africa, we were evaluating the impact of malaria education in Burkina Faso. Women in the Winpanga Credit Association were enthusiastic about their new insecticide-treated mosquito nets. When they got up in the morning and saw dead mosquitoes on the outside of the nets, they had solid evidence that mothers and children were being protected while they slept.

The women also appreciated the information they were given about age-appropriate dosing with chloroquine to treat malaria. Now, they felt confident about educating neighbors and family members. One older woman explained, “What we like best is the solidarity of the group, that we work together. We give each other advice about caring for our children and for our husbands.”

Following the example of the women in Burkina Faso, we must never hesitate to share information or resources to assist our struggling sisters and brothers. Sometimes our individual efforts may seem inadequate in the face of enormous challenges. But like the loaves and the fishes, God accepts our small offerings and combines them with those of others to make a real difference.

—Joanne Leslie

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

—Philippians 2:3-4

FRIDAY, MARCH 17

It was Karen's idea to paint a "Bridge of Hope" mural on the side of the rectory garage, which was attached to the church. The mural was intended to raise awareness and funds for the ministry of Cristosal in El Salvador. Karen is an accomplished artist and could have completed the mural herself, but instead she drew the outline and then with a paint-by-number scheme invited the parish and community to make the vision a reality.

With every brush stroke, volunteers from ages three to eighty-six worked to complete the mural. We were painting a mural of a Bridge of Hope, but we were also building bridges of relationship between young and old, new and longtime friends. Participating in this project reminded me that how we do ministry is as important as the ministry we are seeking to accomplish.

Am I willing to go slower if it will allow others to participate? Am I willing to let go of taking the credit so that the community can say, "Look what we did together!" Karen could have painted the mural without us, but she knew that the building of bridges within our community was what would make the mural truly extraordinary.

—Susan Copley

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

—Matthew 6:10a



SATURDAY, MARCH 18

Two electoral steps in 2015 enabled Sri Lankans to achieve what the world thought was impossible. A violent, authoritarian regime was replaced with a more democratically friendly one – without the firing of even one bullet. This change was made possible because a cross-section of political parties, ethnic and religious groups and economic classes came together. A dynamic Buddhist monk provided courageous leadership, and numerous people’s initiatives and movements said enough is enough. Together, this cross-section of Sri Lanka proved that change can come when communities demonstrate interdependence and a willingness to cross boundaries for the common good.

There are still mountains to climb. The road to reconciliation with justice is a slippery one. The call of “Together we can” is to be reconstructed as “Together we must.” This is not simply a call to political prudence – it points to our role in the reign of God, the shift in history toward a more safe, just and reconciled world for all. As we engage the harsh realities of God’s world, in accordance with the values of Christ who abides in us, endowed with humble and wise discernment prompted by the Spirit, the governance of God will be made manifest through the governance of humans.

—Duleep de Chickera





SUNDAY, MARCH 19

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer

MONDAY, MARCH 20

Seeing out of two eyes makes it possible to perceive depth. This is true for thinking as well; I need at least two perspectives for my mind not to see things as flat and simplistic. Holding multiple viewpoints in tension, rather than choosing one as right and dismissing all the rest as wrong, pushes me to clarify what I think and why. It can also reveal inconsistencies and inaccurate assumptions.

One of the things I love about Education for Ministry (EfM) is the program's practice of reflecting in a group on experiences in daily life from several points of view.

It's something I love about the psalms too. The psalms include a lot of what seems like repetition, but there's always some shift in the way the same idea is expressed, like the poet is turning the image slightly to reveal another facet.

I was inspired listening to Bishop Michael Curry preach (via a live video feed) at his installation as Presiding Bishop. One thing that particularly energized me was his urging of Christians to work together with all kinds of groups, including (and maybe especially) those from opposing viewpoints.

—Tracie Middleton

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

—Genesis 1:27



TUESDAY, MARCH 21

I love to cycle. A couple of years ago, six of us set out on a sponsored pilgrimage to raise money for a home for street children in Brazil. We rode throughout the United Kingdom in a sporting, spiritual journey that took in twenty stadiums over ten days and covered a thousand miles. Some days were a slog; there were times when I wanted to stop, get off my bike and walk. But there were also those moments when the pilgrimage was something else, something good, something that mattered, something, well...beautiful. We would stop and enjoy these times together – a view of the ocean, a climb completed, a panorama that took our breath away.

We are made of soul and bone, dust and spirit, and as we made our journey, we talked about life – the mess, the questions, the drumming in our hearts insisting that there must be a point to all this madness. After the sunset on our final day, we concluded that society has tried to teach us that we want success but what we really crave is wonder. We find wonder when we engage in the creative – and in the art of building community with those near and far.

—Andy Bowerman

Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things! Do not fear, you animals of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and vine give their full yield. O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before.

—Joel 2:21-23

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22

The daily cycle of life on the farm reminds me that God is in relationship with creation – not only or even primarily with humankind, but with all creatures. The sunrise over the trees begins this cycle of life and death every day. It continues through the compost pile and the noisy henhouse – with the new chicks and the spiders eating a breakfast of flying insects caught in the network of webs hovering in the rafters. The ewes awaken beneath, bleating at the glimpse of green grass in the pasture covered in a blanket of dew.

In this season of Lent, it should not surprise us that the darkest places hold the most abundant life. Our soil is teeming with microbes, bacteria and mycorrhizal fungi. These unseen workers make life on Earth possible. Of all the species, these – the smallest – are the least expendable because they are the foundation of everything that lives. Without fertile soil, plants cannot grow, animals cannot survive and humanity's sacred covenant with God is broken.

Don't fear the dark, unknown dirty places. The Earth's fragile skin is where life is found. And upon it is where our relationship with one another and our covenant with God and all living things are kept.

Rejoice and be glad with the soil!

—Lisa Ransom

[Jesus answered the lawyer,] “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

—Luke 10:36-37



THURSDAY, MARCH 23

For the past decade, I have been privileged to work collaboratively with representatives of two dozen faith-based organizations to bring justice and mercy to survivors of natural disasters through long-term recovery assistance. I constantly see the Holy Spirit at work through the compassion and dedication of the men and women who make up these diverse organizations as we serve our neighbors. We define our neighbors in the same way Jesus does in the parable of the Good Samaritan – they are the people in need of our help.

We are a mix of various Christian denominations (Adventists, Catholics, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, Methodists, Mennonites, Presbyterians, etc.) plus Buddhists, Jews, Mormons and others who don't identify with a particular tradition. Individually, none of us can provide the recovery resources needed by our neighbors. But even though we draw upon many different scriptures and texts, we collectively form a community of blessing for all our sisters and brothers.

As an Episcopalian, my first inspiration for this work is best expressed in our Baptismal Covenant where we affirm that we are here to “seek and serve Christ in all persons,” loving our neighbors as ourselves.

—Dave Baylor

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

—1 Corinthians 12:12-13

FRIDAY, MARCH 24

I lost a great deal becoming the person that God has wonderfully created me to be. In the months that followed my coming out and social transition as a transgender person, I lost nearly everything. I entered a state of vulnerability unlike anything I had ever experienced, becoming absolutely reliant on the generosity and goodness of total strangers because I was literally unable to do it myself.

Many people helped me navigate this part of my journey. A friend invited me to attend her downtown parish. I've been there ever since because of their acceptance. One Sunday, as we passed the peace, a total stranger reached out, shook my hand and left a \$20 bill in my palm. They will never know that because of their generosity, I was able to purchase groceries that very afternoon. I would not have had this powerful transformative experience if not for my friend's invitation to participate in a community that was open and hospitable toward me. I pray that my presence in their midst has enabled others in the parish to be transformed as much as they have transformed me. Together in our vulnerability and generosity, we can be agents of transformation for the whole world.

—Gwen Fry

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

—1 Peter 4:8-10



SATURDAY, MARCH 25

I play drums. If I sequester myself in my drum room for a while, I can improve my technique, maybe learn a new rhythm, and generally benefit exactly one person – me. If I play together with other musicians, magic can sometimes happen. If we play in front of an audience, it's quite possible they will feel this magic too. Suddenly, hundreds (thousands?) of people have their lives positively transformed, if only for a little while, because we are all in it together.

Peter tells us that we can love and forgive one another in our immediate families – or we can expand that love and forgiveness into our community and to other communities and countries, regardless of race, religion or any other differences. We can express hospitality by inviting a few close friends to dinner, or our entire country can open its arms to refugees from war-torn parts of the world. We can each sit in our “drum room” by ourselves or share our gifts alongside others in a much greater collective and effective way.

Episcopal Relief & Development is a vibrant example of sharing love, hospitality and God's gifts throughout the world. Together we can.

—Chuck Hamilton





SUNDAY, MARCH 26

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

—Colossians 3:12

MONDAY, MARCH 27

Out of compassion and kindness, we said “yes” and formed a Table. The Holy Spirit is doing the rest. We are an unlikely diverse group of nine including Clara (not her real name), our sister in Christ. On a Sunday afternoon in Lent 2016, we began a yearlong commitment with a potluck that involved sharing our stories. The next week, we heard Clara’s story and her life plan. This is the Open Table: a weekly one-hour commitment to work with an individual or family who is ready to transform their life.

Clara, a middle-aged woman, was unemployed and living in transitional housing. Her life plan is filled with practical goals and wild dreams. As I am writing this, we are halfway through the year, working together as the Body of Christ. Clara now sports new glasses, follows a budget, is completing orientation for employment, and is days away from moving into her own apartment. We have found that patience and humility are key; together, we are making a difference. You can too.

Learn more: www.theopentable.org

—Angela F. Shepherd

We give thee but thine own, whate'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee.

**—The Lutheran Hymnal, #441
William Walsham How**



TUESDAY, MARCH 28

Owing to school and work, I have lived at eight addresses in five states over the past ten years. Although a fair amount of adventure is involved in packing up and making a go at life in different contexts, this has never been an easy process for me. Mentally and physically exhausting from beginning to end, moving brings up feelings of being set adrift.

I am reminded in these times of loneliness, excitement, uncertainty and enthusiasm that God has not given us “spirit[s] of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7) Indeed, every uncomfortable, unfamiliar context allows an opportunity for us to discern how we will use our spiritual gifts to serve God and neighbor.

While the process of starting over is rarely easy, it has taught me how to travel lightly. The greatest joy is not found in piles of cardboard boxes but rather in the remembering that all of us together have work to do – upholding and supporting each other as we love God and our new neighbors.

—Chris Sikkema

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

—John 10:10

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29

Droughts and floods caused by climate change are wreaking havoc in the lives and livelihoods of farmers in India. In 2014, the National Crime Records Bureau of India reported 5,650 farmer suicides. In the past year, in the western state of Maharashtra, farmers were committing suicide at a rate of eight people per day.

Jesus came into this world to give life – in all its fullness. Jesus revealed himself as the bread of life. Farmers are lifegivers too, producing the food we eat. But farmers in India are unable to sustain farming at current costs. Lent foretells the coming of spring, which signifies new life. As spring begins, the Church should turn its heart toward the plight of farmers. As economic and environmental tensions push farmers to the verge of death, the Church is called to stand with them. Standing like Jesus in favor of the people who share bread for the sustenance of life, the Church can be a source of life and light for the farmers.

Episcopal Relief & Development and the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action are working together to empower farmers, both men and women, to reduce suicides by providing agricultural education in the Yavatmal District of Maharashtra. As we meditate on Jesus the life giver, let us take action to stop loss of life around the globe in any form as Jesus did.

—Joycia Thorat

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

—Hebrews 12:1



THURSDAY, MARCH 30

When I was a kid, I loved collecting rocks. While visiting a relative, I learned of a marvelous invention – a rock polisher. It was a machine with a motor that would continuously turn a coffee-can-sized cylinder. You put your rocks in the cylinder, turned it on and left it tumbling. In time those rocks bumped up against one another and broke off the sharp edges and ground down the rough spots. The rocks came out of that coffee can looking like jewels to my childhood eyes. The rocks weren't transformed into gemstones but they sure were shiny and beautiful in their own right.

So I think of church as God's tumbling coffee can for our souls. We come together and as we interact we bump into one another, sharing our conflicting ideas and diverse perspectives. In the process, our souls are polished. And not just in church. The people in our lives teach us how to be the unique person God is calling us to be. Other people are the voice of God to us.

God uses each of us to shape and teach others. So it's a good thing we're not all the same. There's a beautiful soul in each of us, and as we worship in churches full of lots of different Christian people, God makes us each more the person we are called to be, not by changing us into something we're not, but by helping each of us shine.

—Michael Buerkel Hunn

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

—1 Corinthians 12:4-7

FRIDAY, MARCH 31

As Jesus puts together his team, he allows space for the varied gifts of the disciples. Even betrayal can be seen as a gift in the larger context of God's plan.

My work on the Episcopal Asset Map has been such a blessing. Spending the day listening to people talk about all of their giftedness has transformed me. I know that our Church is not dying – it is being transformed. The Church is going through its own Lenten season: We are letting go of things that keep us from connecting with our communities, releasing physical and spiritual barriers, building new and transforming relationships and stretching our edges as we live deeply into the life-giving Gospel of inclusion.

Stripping away the things that separate me from God and my community prepares me for death and resurrection. My times of loss didn't feel good, but with the support of my community, I have come out on the other side. These scars have been transformed into gifts for the common good.

What scars have been transformed into gifts in your community?

—Tamara Plummer

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—Romans 15:5-6



SATURDAY, APRIL 1

My smart, agnostic, twenty-something son does not want to engage me in conversation about religious values, but he will discuss at length one thing he is very interested in – brain science. I’ve been reading up on the subject and been delighted to discover how much our Christian values of loving and serving others are reflected in studies of how human brains function best across groups.

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he prays to God that the strong and the weak be given the steadfastness and encouragement to live together in harmony with one another. He asks Jesus’ followers to serve others over themselves, to build up others instead of themselves, to glorify God with one voice.

Scientific studies on the unconscious part of our human brain show how much we identify ourselves by group membership – woman, white, mother, Christian – and we unconsciously discriminate against others. Only when different groups work together for a common purpose to overcome common difficulties, does discrimination cease.

Please God, grant us humans the endurance to work with you in common purpose, using the best of our science and religious understanding, to create abundant lives for all groups.

—Neysa Ellgren





SUNDAY, APRIL 2

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer

*What life have you if you have not life together?
There is no life that is not in community,
And no community not lived in praise of God.*

—T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from “The Rock”*

MONDAY, APRIL 3

There was a time when I believed a healthy neighborhood was a community where everyone was well-off and where individual needs were always met by abundance. Instead, I am finding that a healthy neighborhood is a community where abundant relationships exist.

Relationships outweigh prosperity. Health exists in standing together both in times of celebration and in grief. Neighbors aren't perfect, but they know one another, and they value their presence. There is life in community. I think church communities are much the same.

A healthy church is not a place where people hide behind a façade of who they believe they ought to be. This is why Lenten disciplines of exploration of the inner self, the universal and personal need for redemption, and the powerful nature of practicing repentance can be such a significant experience when done together. When our practice is lived out with others, we can come to know that our imperfections are a beautiful part of who God has created. We recognize the value of our interdependence because we see the incarnate God. We have life – **and have it abundantly** – because we have it together.

—John Burruss

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

—Hebrews 10:24-25



TUESDAY, APRIL 4

Together we hasten the coming of the Kingdom.

I was at Los Angeles International Airport, flying home the day after a power outage caused a ripple effect of flight delays and cancellations. On a good day, LAX can barely handle all the people coming and going; this particular day, conditions were at their worst. I asked an airport employee how she was doing on her extra-long shift. She said she was amazed at how wonderful folks were being, “given all they are going through.” She told of witnessing numerous acts of kindness between strangers. As did I.

At the gate, I saw a man scanning the area for a place to sit. A woman offered her seat, but before she could get up, another person offered his. He said he had been waiting twenty-six hours and it was time to stand for a while. Then, cascading ripples: “I can hold your baby so you can eat.” “I’m finished with this newspaper – would you like it?” “They just restocked the kiosk – do you want something?”

It was a glimpse of the approaching Day.

—Irene Tanabe

*Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

Isaiah 41:10

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

When we pause with the desire to be restored in our relationship with God, ourselves and others—even though we may not know exactly how—we give God the opportunity to meet us. We have a loving God who always walks with us and never abandons us, and it is in seeking to be one with God that God always surprises us.

In a recent encounter with God's holy presence, I was attending a service of laying on of hands and anointing for healing. It was a powerful experience, as I was in my own desert fighting my own wild beasts.

As I approached the priest, I didn't know what to expect. When the priest made the sign of the cross on my forehead with holy oil and prayed for me, I was totally surprised.

As a priest myself, I realized that I too have been called to be an instrument of healing to God's people. I discovered God's divine presence of healing and forgiveness. In that moment of the service, I felt I was restored to wholeness and was one with God.

I would like to invite you to try the same: to surrender to being surprised by God's divine presence of healing and forgiveness. Our loving God, I believe, wants to be in relationship with you also.

—Alfredo Feregrino

Jesus came and stood among them and said: "Peace be with you."

—John 20:19



THURSDAY, APRIL 6

First came the text messages and loud alerts. Then an announcement from the Emergency Alert System crackled on the radio in the church kitchen: This was not a test. TORNADOS had been spotted in our area. We were instructed to move to a safe place and take cover.

That day, two hundred members of our parish were gathered for a visioning day. We were looking to the future, praying and working to discern God's dream for our church. Suddenly, we found ourselves packed like sardines in a hallway and classrooms. No one panicked. We kept on working. In those cramped quarters, we could hear lively conversations, new ideas and even laughter. In a fearful moment, we were at peace. Thankfully, it wasn't long before we heard the all-clear, but what about those people who experience disaster, who don't hear the all-clear?

When Jesus meets the disciples in the room where they are hiding after his arrest and crucifixion, they realize that this isn't a test. This is real life. Scary things can and will happen to us and to those we love. But Jesus meets all of us in that tight space of fear and says, "Peace be with you."

Together, in fearful moments, we can draw on our faith and share the deep peace of Christ with each other.

—David C. Killeen

*Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
as more of heaven in each other we see;
some softening gleam of love and prayer
shall dawn on every cross and care.*

— *The Hymnal 1982, #10*
John Keble

FRIDAY, APRIL 7

I was fortunate to travel to Ghana last year with Episcopal Relief & Development. I joined a group of Episcopalians from the United States to enter into the sacred space of Ghanaian families participating in projects and programs addressing their very own poverty.

Amidst the Ghanaians' very concrete and compelling needs, their wealth of spirit stuck with me like a lump in my throat. Women danced to welcome us in every place, opening their homes, their lives and their very intimate celebrations to a group of perfect strangers. They reminded me what it means to be a woman, a Christian and a person who celebrates the strength of the Holy Spirit while in the midst of suffering. They were the "lovelier be" to me, the heaven I could once again see in another, the softening of a long hardened gaze, the reminder of beauty and the vulnerability of prayer and the promise of a coming dawn.

May we learn to see the heaven in others as we turn toward Christ and the promise of the sunrise.

—Karen Longenecker

Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself?...Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

—Isaiah 58:5-6



SATURDAY, APRIL 8

I chose this passage from the prophet Isaiah because it is a core reading for Jews during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Much of the structure of this day and the prayers focus on the individual's relationship with God. However, the litanies of sins all begin with the word "we," recognizing that the community is coming together to acknowledge its wrongdoings.

In this reading, we hear a powerful reminder that repentance is not just about the individual: It is an exhortation to come together to make social change, to improve the world. As the text unfolds, we are instructed to feed and clothe those in need, to do work that can only be done in community and to act together with righteousness to create a more just world.

At American Jewish World Service we do this work of repentance together with Episcopal Relief & Development and other partner organizations in places that are hurting around the world. We recognize that the people we serve have firsthand experiences of oppression and their own visions of justice. We believe that our responsibility is to bring our communities together to support these social change efforts around the world. This will, as the prophet goes on to say, let our light break forth like the dawn and the glory of the Almighty encompass us.

—Ruth W. Messinger





PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 9

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer

*Oh, how very good and pleasant it is,
when brethren live together in unity!*

—Psalm 133:1

MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK, APRIL 10

Recently, my wife and I were thrown a baby shower in honor of our son's birth. The host had everyone share why they thought we would be good parents. We are hopeful to live into their kind words.

I was genuinely touched by the messages of each person, speaking about the interconnectedness of our lives and how we have blessed one another. It made me realize that while parenthood is terrifying, we are surrounded by a village. We do not have to traverse this path alone. Our community girds us, and we are strengthened by one another's love and compassion.

I think about my friends around the world who have welcomed me into their homes and shared with me their tables. We are linked by the laughs we share and the tears we cry. These connections make the world very small to me.

I think about what kind of Earth my child will inherit. He will be his own man, but I want to teach him what it means to be in community, to know that the wider we can throw open the doors of our hearts, the richer and stronger our community becomes. Today, I ask you to ponder this: How small is your world? How open are your doors?

—Chad Brinkman

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

—Matthew 25:35-36



TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK, APRIL 11

The great commission that we have received from Jesus Christ is to serve him by preaching the Gospel to others in our acts – by doing the work of feeding, clothing, comforting and encouraging our brothers and sisters.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), we partner with Episcopal Relief & Development to strengthen religious leaders and communities in their responses to and prevention of gender-based violence. In this partnership, we aim to physically and spiritually feed vulnerable people by teaching them new methods of livelihoods and telling them about God's love for them. Thanks to this important work, religious leaders in the Diocese of Aru in the DRC rejected the custom of forcing a girl to marry the man responsible for her pregnancy. Because they confronted this custom, our religious leaders have helped reduce early marriages and early pregnancies. They also help women access health care, education, information, income-generating activities and justice to achieve positions of responsibility for the development of their communities.

Lent invites us to reflect on the love of God and neighbor and to assess what we have done for thousands of vulnerable women and girls in my country that is torn by hatred, injustice, murder and wars.

—Louise Bashige

That we may be bound together by your Holy Spirit in the communion of all your saints, entrusting one another and all our life to Christ,

We entreat you, O Lord.

—The Book of Common Prayer

WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK, APRIL 12

I woke early one morning months ago from a vivid dream in which my mother (who died four years ago) and I were assembling the baby bed that had been my daughter's. I learned two weeks later that my daughter was pregnant – but I already knew.

I await the arrival of my first grandchild any day now. She will be named after her two great-great-grandmothers, strong women of deep faith. Who will she be? What kind of woman will she become? That is in God's hands. We can but cherish and love her – teach her to be kind and generous with all those she meets, to give of herself in humility.

I see my mother and grandmothers each time I receive communion. At the altar rail, I meet them once again in that thin place, that sacred space where the communion of saints abides in holy convergence as I hold up my hands to receive the body of Christ. I remember their strength, their giftedness and their lessons, and I am connected through the generations.

I entreat you, O Lord, that my new granddaughter will grow in the light of Christ and will someday remember me with love in that same thin place.

—Carol E. Barnwell

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

—John 13:34



MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 13

The Gospel of John uses two Greek verbs for love interchangeably: *agape* for self-giving love and *philos* for the love of a friend. It's as if the author of the Gospel of John can't tell the difference between a regular friend and the kind that you would die for. Upping the stakes, the gospel writer has Jesus commanding us to live in this relationship. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you." If it weren't a commandment, I might shrink away from it. I can only take up this great task if some greater power requires it. Living in love is not just about the pleasure of another's company – it is also about the cracking open of my heart. It isn't just about the feeling of love – it's about the decision to love.

Significantly, the Gospel of John never commands people to love God. The love that you might think is the first and greatest commandment isn't found in John's Gospel. Instead, we are commanded to love each other. It is in this love that we find God's love. Love binds God in the dance we call Trinity. Love is the power of God to hold all things together in singularity and to open our hearts so that there is more room for the Trinity to dwell and dance in our lives. When we dare to have our hearts opened, God is able to draw closer to us. When we risk losing our autonomy in relationship, God is right next to us, making us into love.

—Paul D. Fromberg

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

—Hebrews 10:24-25

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 14

“Well, Jim, it’s cancer.” I already knew it. Funny...I wasn’t at all freaked out or traumatized by it. Really. I had made peace with God and myself. I was ready for anything.

Each day in the radiation lab, I saw the same patients over and over. I have never had such an experience – the warmth, pats on the back, words of support and encouragement to each other and our companions. “Hang in there, my friend; I’m keeping you in my thoughts and prayers,” the all-knowing smiles. The healthcare professionals were equally supportive. We became family from all walks of life, together in a lifeboat. Each day, I saw God in the faces of my fellow patients. I felt a tangible sense of love pervading the atmosphere. I had a strong, strong sense of community, just knowing things would be well. They were. And they are.

—Jim Carlton

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

—Matthew 12:50



HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 15

Jesus knows no other speed than full throttle, urgently proclaiming the Gospel of God's Kingdom at hand. So when Jesus' family attempts to take him home, he points to his disciples and says, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus realizes that his proclamation of God's Kingdom can only be proclaimed effectively through a community. Jesus, the ultimate community organizer, knows that it will take a community to provide the multiplicity of voices and the different roles needed within a movement for change to take place. Paul also teaches us this, explaining that each of us contributes to the Body of Christ by providing our own gifts and talents to do the work. It takes people working together to create the collective synergy necessary to make manifest God's Kingdom.

—Al Rodriguez

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

—Romans 12:4-5

EASTER DAY, APRIL 16

As president of Episcopal Relief & Development, I know the meaning of *together*. We are a diverse family that includes staff, board, donors, partners and those in need of a helping hand. We are one body, but each of us has unique gifts and roles to play in healing a hurting world. And yet, we can only do our work together in community.

Moses does not go alone; he brings together a group of seventy elders to rule over Israel. Jesus doesn't either; he calls together the twelve and sends them out, two by two, to share the Good News in word and deed. Jesus rises from the dead to live among the whole human family.

As a part of the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement, we are not alone in our work. We work with Anglican and Episcopal dioceses and provinces, along with other Christian and faith-based organizations and groups of our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters.

Every day, I thank God and pray for members of our Episcopal Relief & Development team and extended family. I hope you will join me in prayer and thanksgiving for all who are a part of our family of faith as we begin this holy season of Easter.

—Robert W. Radtke



MY LENTEN RESPONSE

During this season of reflection, I want to join in community with my brothers and sisters around the world to follow Jesus in caring for all people. Enclosed is my Lenten offering to help make communities stronger and to invest in a thriving future for all of our global friends.

Episcopal Relief & Development's diverse, faithful community has responded compassionately to human suffering in the world. In partnership with churches, communities, supporters and friends, we make a difference in the lives of more than 3 million people in nearly 40 countries worldwide.

It takes all our hands to heal a hurting world. Please join us by investing in Episcopal Relief & Development's vital mission and giving meaningfully to support our work to strengthen communities around the globe. Our programs promote health, respond to disasters, improve food supply and create economic opportunities in Jesus' name. Together, we are seeking to serve Christ in all persons and striving to love our neighbor as ourselves.

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For over 75 years, Episcopal Relief & Development has served as a compassionate response of The Episcopal Church to human suffering in the world. An independent 501(c)(3) organization, it works closely with Anglican Communion and ecumenical partners, helping communities to create long-term development strategies and rebuild after disasters. Using the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework, the agency reaches more than 3 million people in nearly 40 countries each year, through multi-sector programs that fight poverty, hunger and disease.

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