

Be still,  
and know that I am God

Psaltn 46:10



2024 | Lenten  Devotional

Written by the community of St Francis Episcopal Church

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## elcome to the eighth annual Lenten Devotional Booklet.

This year's theme is "*Be Still, and Know That I Am God*,"  
inspired by Psalm 46:

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the fields with fire. He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

Scripture tells us God is ever-present in our lives, regardless of our personal circumstances, regardless of the world's circumstances. Knowing this, how can we become more mindful of creating the habit of turning our focus toward him? An obvious choice is in your hands: this little booklet! Filled with scripture verses appointed for each day, this work invites you to unplug, decompress, and be still as you sit with God, His Word, and reflections written by your fellow parishioners.

Thank you to all who said "Yes" to my invitation to write. Without your reflections, of course, this booklet would not exist! Thank you, Laurie Anderson, for finetuning the devotionals with your keen editing skills; thank you, Susan Marshall, for volunteering your time to design a beautiful end product; and thank you, Claire Erbeznik, for printing and preparing this booklet for distribution. Together, we have created a Lenten experience our parish family can walk through as a faith community.

So let the journey through a meaningful and Holy Lent begin ...

Kristina Pelá

*Ministry Council Lead & Shepherd for Pastoral Care*

# Carving Out Devotional Time

**F**or starters, keep it simple!



The key is to place yourself in surroundings that afford you the mental space to just “be”. Perhaps it’s a ritual of lighting a candle and settling onto the couch or at a table with a journal; perhaps it’s outdoors, taking a walk or sitting in your garden; perhaps you can center yourself during your commute, or perhaps you stay in bed when you first arise and delve into the scriptures right away. Explore what works best for you.

Invite the Holy Spirit to be a part of your devotional time, praying from your heart or using a prepared prayer such as this:

*Dear God,  
Quiet my heart so that I may be still before You.  
Fill me with Your presence,  
and let Your Word  
and the reflections of Your people  
help me to hear Your voice.*

Read through the day’s scriptures slowly and deliberately, taking note of what words, phrases or images resonate with you. You may choose to journal or make notations in your Lenten Booklet. Read through the scriptures a second time, again noticing what catches your attention. Finish with the writer’s reflection.

Consider why certain phrases catch your attention and how they might be relevant to your present circumstances. Allow God’s Word and your thoughts to “marinate,” and trust that the Spirit is working during your devotional time and beyond.

May your devotional time fill you and be a time of discovery!

In God’s Love,

Kristina Pelá,  
*Ministry Council Lead & Shepherd for Pastoral Care*

# Ash Wednesday, February 14

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Amos 5:6-15, Psalm 95, Hebrews 12:1-14, Luke 18:9-14

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*“For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins—you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate.” Amos 5:12*

In order for redemption to work, we must recognize our need to be redeemed, i.e., we must admit that we have sinned. The promise of salvation, or the equation for grace, is actually quite simple: we must admit fault and ask for forgiveness. I believe that our final judgment will find each of us facing Christ, who will say to us, “I love you, and you are forgiven.” There will be those who accept his forgiveness, repent of their sins, and walk into the kingdom. And there will be those who say, “For what?”

Lent would be much easier if we could admit at the outset that we are horrible people, doomed to hell but for the grace of God. I sometimes get the feeling that while we are acknowledging our manifold wretchedness on Ash Wednesday we are saying to ourselves, “Sure, I’m a wretched sinner, but thank God I’m not like that wretched sinner behind me.” Much like the Pharisee in today’s gospel, we often fool ourselves into believing that we are good people, because we go to church, give to the needy, and don’t gossip...too much. But as Amos forcibly reminds us, God knows our many transgressions. We may fool others and ourselves, but we cannot fool God into thinking we are good. Ash Wednesday is not just about our imminent mortality; it is also about our dependence on Christ alone. Only in cleaving to Christ can we transcend the dust from whence we come. We make ourselves physically uncomfortable during Lent in an attempt to right our souls. We use Rite I instead of Rite II because it feels like a punishment. But God’s justice is not retributive—there is no pound of flesh to put on the scale. God is not calling us to needlessly suffer or make ourselves miserable (and Rite I shouldn’t be used or prayed as penance—it is a celebration of thanksgiving, not an instrument of pain).

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# Ash Wednesday, February 14

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Amos 5:6-15, Psalm 95, Hebrews 12:1-14, Luke 18:9-14

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Once we admit our guilt, it becomes increasingly difficult and burdensome to ignore God's call to love one another. At heart, we want to do right—we want to love—so let us admit fault, accept grace, and love God. Amen.



*The Rev. Jason Shelby is the rector of St. Francis in Palos Verdes Estates; before arriving there he served parishes in the Dioceses of Mississippi and Louisiana. Jason graduated from the School of Theology at Sewanee with his Masters of Divinity, and from Indiana University with a B.A. in History. He and his wife Jennifer have three children and little free time.*

# Thursday, February 15

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Habakkuk 3:1-18, Psalm 37, Phil 3:12-21, John 17:1-8

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*Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have laid hold of it, but one thing I have laid hold of: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 3, 13-14.

Happy Thursday! The hard work of Lent starts here. We’ve had the communal get-together and feasting of Shrove Tuesday, and the deep solemnity of gathering on Ash Wednesday being reminded that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. And now it’s Thursday, and we’re on our own, so to speak, facing the next thirty-nine days and thirty-nine nights. What to do?

Well, perhaps we could do no worse than to take our lead from Saint Paul. And further, perhaps we can take comfort in the fact that even Paul has to work at it, and, by his own admission, hasn’t got there. None of us are perfect. But what we can do is keep our eye on the prize, keep pressing on toward the goal, little by little, step by step.

In our expectation-ridden, over-achieving world, doing Lent “properly” can be just another burden we add to everything else we’re trying to do perfectly. Are we really going to (metaphorically!) scourge ourselves every day for the next six weeks? And scourge ourselves further when we fail? I hope not! If we fail, we can take Paul’s advice: forget what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead, pressing on towards the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly God in Christ Jesus.

So, let’s take a minute to reflect. What thing can I do today to press on? What one small step can I take? Rinse and repeat: it will surely add up.



*Peter Marshall is a former St Francis parishioner who now lives with his wife Susan in Northern Virginia.*

# Friday, February 16

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Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32, Psalm 35, Philippians 4:1-9, John 17:9-19

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*“...Turn, then, and live.”* Ezekiel 18:32

This last line from Ezekiel 18 resonated the most with me. I think it's because it was so succinct and clear. The chapter is about transgressions, and to end it with just four words was very powerful. I also feel the word “turn” is a hopeful word, as in telling someone their health has turned for the better, turning a page in a book, or turning to look and move forward. Of course we know Webster's definition, but there is also the biblical definition. Repent. This immediately made me think of people who are on busy street corners or at a certain farmer's market on a megaphone admonishing everyone to repent for their sins (or else!). I must admit upon hearing them I often feel a twinge of irritation; but as I reflect on it more, I should just think of them as messengers of faith, love, and Christianity. However, less fire and brimstone would be nice.

I want to enter the Lenten season with the hope that these four words can stay with me and everyone else, on a daily basis all year long in our interactions and thoughts. Turn the corner, or as Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek and then try to live our lives fully. It is a short and sweet reminder that its never too late to strive to understand, forgive, show compassion and kindness, and try to live the way God wants us to and to keep at it. In Philippians 4:9, the last verse reads “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you”.

There are lots of things that come at us. We are human and imperfect, but we should remember we can turn to God. No megaphone required.



*Frances Yee has attended St. Francis since 2012 with her family husband Hal and 2 wonderful sons. She enjoys cooking, reading about cooking, eating, exploring new places, and chatting with friends. She currently serves on Altar Guild.*

# Saturday, February 17

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Ezekiel 39:21-29, Psalm 42 or 43, Philippians 4:10-20, John 17:20-26

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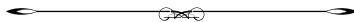
*“These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.”* Psalm 41

Ever felt lost? Ever felt disconnected? Ever felt yourself wondering – to paraphrase another line from Psalm 41 - “where is my God”?

I know I have, and I know it will happen again. I know there will be times when I just feel disconnected from God, when I feel adrift, when I feel empty, when I begin to doubt. And, like the psalmist, I find myself surrounded by skeptical voices, saying, “Where is your God?” and I struggle to answer. That skeptical voice may be my own.

And perhaps in this season of Lent, when the expectations are that we should all be connecting with God a little more than usual, we might feel the pressure. Is this – whatever “this” is – working for me? Am I being sufficiently spiritual, godly, pious, Christian? Is Jesus talking to me? Am I so deaf, so deadened, that I cannot hear?

Stop. I take a breath. Relax. I close my eyes and go back to church. I am in a throng, a procession, and we’re all here together with our glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving. Once more I start to reconnect, my thirst for God, my thirst for something holy, is quenched. It’s not perfect, but it’s sufficient.



*Peter Marshall is a former St Francis parishioner who now lives with his wife Susan in Northern Virginia.*



# Sunday, FEBRUARY 18



God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1

# Monday, February 19

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Genesis 37:1-11, Psalm 44, 1 Corinthians 1:1-19, Mark 1:1-13

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There are a number of themes in the Psalms such as encouragement and comfort, promise, exultation, anguish/lament, and beseeching. Psalm 44 falls into the latter two categories: (O Lord) “Why have you hidden your face and forgotten our affliction and oppression?” “Rise up and help us, and save us . . .” This reminds me of the words of Jesus on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” There are times in our lives when we become utterly overwhelmed by life’s circumstances, and when we’re in the dark about how to resolve certain problems. At those times we can certainly feel as the psalmist did, that God has abandoned us.

These feelings were most prominent and relentless in my life for about seven years when my late husband was afflicted with dementia. This disease affects people in different ways; Keith became very childlike, confused and agitated. He did enjoy meeting with friends, and going to movies or out to dinner, and in these situations he almost became his “old self”, enjoying others’ companionship and entering into conversations. At home, it was a different story. He began to constantly ask to “go home”, but no amount of my questioning, or even little trips in the car, could cause him to remember an actual destination. It fell to me to run the entire household, including the finances, in addition to spending more and time taking care of him, then, gradually, he began to forget who I was. He would often say, “So, when you’re not working here, where do you live?” Not only was I getting physically worn out but, having my companion of 50-plus years suddenly not recognize me was emotionally devastating.

Then Covid isolation came along. No more dinners out, movies or getting together with friends, and his condition quickly deteriorated. He had no idea why we couldn’t go anywhere and nothing I said or did would mollify him. My frustration in the fruitless pursuit of trying to help him became overwhelming, and almost daily I felt as the psalmist said, “O, Lord, . . . Why have you hidden your face?” However, sometimes I also found a little solace in the Psalms: all of Psalm 23, and parts of others, such as Psalm 37, “Take delight in the Lord and He will give you your heart’s desire”. . . “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”

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# Monday, February 19

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Genesis 37:1-11, Psalm 44, 1 Corinthians 1:1-19, Mark 1:1-13

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In today's 1 Corinthians passage, Paul tells the people that (in Christ) "you are not lacking in any spiritual gift . . ." and that "God is faithful" . . . "He will also strengthen you to the end, . . ." I can't imagine how I would have kept my own sanity through those years without my faith in Christ and guidance from the Bible.



*Laurie Anderson has been an active member of St. Francis for over 20 years, regularly attending the 8:00 services. She has lived in PVE for 50 years, has two grown sons and three grandchildren, and now lives alone since the passing of her husband of 57 years, Keith, in 2021.*

# Tuesday, February 20

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Genesis 37:12-24, Psalm 47 or 48, 1 Corinthians 1:20-31, Mark 1:14-28

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- 1 *Clap your hands, all you nations;  
shout to God with cries of joy.*
- 2 *For the Lord Most High is awesome,  
the great King over all the earth.*
- 3 *He subdued nations under us,  
peoples under our feet.*
- 4 *He chose our inheritance for us,  
the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.[b]*
- 5 *God has ascended amid shouts of joy,  
the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets.*
- 6 *Sing praises to God, sing praises;  
sing praises to our King, sing praises.* Psalm 47:1-6

I am not very musical – don't sing in the choir...don't really play an instrument (piano lessons from 6 – 8 years old never really stuck), but as I read this, I felt the energy and the joy that comes with celebrating our Lord in our Psalms (by the way – I had to look it up, but Webster's says a Psalm is "a sacred song or poem used in worship".)

I tend to focus on and enjoy the more uplifting readings and this one fit the bill. I get goosebumps as I read it and imagine being one of those clapping and singing, with trumpets blaring as we praise the Lord. I realize that sometimes I show up at church tired and not really engaged, but when we read or sing a Psalm like this, I immediately focus on the "awesomeness" of God.

I have to acknowledge that it seems like I often take God and his works for granted. I might drop a little "thank you" into a prayer now and then, but this Psalm calls us to real demonstrable and public action – clap, shout, sing praises. It also reminds us of how awesome God is – clearly deserving of our visible and audible praise. Most of us at St Francis are on the "reserved" side, but I hope that as we read or sing Psalms like this, we all get energy and joy, and perhaps we could even get a little less inhibited and clap our hands and shout out the praise.



*Robin Pano has been a parishioner since ~1992. She is "mostly" retired, with two grown married daughters in the San Francisco area. She loves traveling, outdoor activities, watching sports and hanging with friends and family.*

# Wednesday, February 21

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Genesis 37:25-36, Psalm 49, 1 Corinthians 2:1-13, Mark 1:29-45

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Have you ever had a plant that had meaning for you? Growing up, my father especially loved two plants, the Crown of Thorns and The Coat of Many Colors, my personal favorite. It has very vibrant colors and bright pink, purple and yellow flowers that hang and drop from the top of the plant. I'm not sure if this is the correct name for this plant, but it's what was always told to me by my father. When I water these plants, I think of the references in the Bible.

“The coat of many colors” relates to Joseph’s coat, discussed in today’s Genesis reading. It has even been an inspiration for a Broadway play, “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” by Tim Rice. This romanticized title of the story tells how Jacob gifts his oldest son a beautiful, colorful coat. This coat was not ordinary and would have likely stood out in a crowd for its rich material and embroidery. It caused his brothers to be so jealous they had thoughts of killing him. Instead, they sold him, and Joseph ended up in Egypt. Many situations can cause rifts among people, but Psalm 49 reminds us that everyone dies and whatever you have on earth will be left behind when you go to the grave.

The thoughts Joseph’s brothers had were heinous, and perhaps the youngest son, Reuben, was guided by God’s spirit when they eventually decided to sell Joseph instead of killing him. 1 Corinthians 2: 1-13 reminds that every word we speak is guided by God’s spirit. Their decision to sell Joseph appealed to their greed, another deadly sin. In Joseph’s story, pride led to their jealousy and wanting to destroy their brother, which caused sadness in their father’s heart. This is a clear example of Man’s inhumanity to man.

The atrocities in Israel and Gaza exemplify similar themes that continue to repeat throughout history. The Hamas terrorists raiding, killing and taking hostages demonstrate that God’s spirit is certainly not within them. Israel’s response with relentless bombing and destruction is retaliation that they believe will right these wrongs. At this time, over 25,000 people are dead and thousands more suffering.

Has man not gained any wisdom over the centuries? One prays that clearer heads will listen to God’s spirit and peace will be restored.

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# Wednesday, February 21

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Genesis 37:25-36, Psalm 49, 1 Corinthians 2:1-13, Mark 1:29-45

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Back to my plants, I still have them growing in my patio and plan to pass them on, and their story.



*Cheryl Gutierrez has been a member of St. Francis for 30 years. She and her husband, Hector, have one daughter, Sabrina, and are blessed helping to take care of a 3-year-old granddaughter, Isolde. Cheryl has enjoyed being one of the original members of St. Teresa's Guild. Volunteering her time with the St. Francis Outreach Scholarship Fund is a special love.*

# Thursday, February 22

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Genesis 39:1-23, Psalm 59 or 60, 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15, Mark 2:1-12

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*“Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man... “Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. Mark 2:9-12*

In this passage (Mark 2:1-12), Jesus forgives a man’s sins and cures his paralysis. Importantly he links the two actions as if they are synonymous. In other words, that by forgiving the man’s sins, he heals his paralysis. In doing so, Jesus also demonstrates to the large crowd that were there to hear him preach that he has the power to do both. This passage follows the stories of Jesus driving out an impure spirit, healing many with various diseases, and cleansing a man with leprosy. These miracles occurred over a few days in Capernaum, a small fishing village on the Sea of Galilee. One might imagine that the teachers of the law that were sitting at the house where the paralyzed man was brought would have been aware of what Jesus had done, indeed it seems likely that they were at the house to observe and listen to him. Yet, when he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven,” they thought to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Jesus, knowing what they were thinking confronts them, saying, “Why are you thinking these things?” He then says and does what is written in the verse quoted at the top. Needless to say, “This amazed everyone and they praised God.”

This story reminds me of Jesus’ divine power to both forgive sins and heal. Indeed, the teachers thought, “who can forgive sins but God alone,” and then Jesus demonstrated his divinity by forgiving the man’s sins, and very tangibly exclaims this divine authority by commanding the paralyzed man to get up and go home in full view of the teachers and crowd. This passage also reminds me, as a physician, of how blessed I am to be able to help those that are ill, and as a Christian, of Jesus’ teaching to forgive those who sin against us.

At the very end of the passage, in response to this miracle, the crowd said, “We have never seen anything like this!” Even 2000 years later, we would say the same.



*Hal Yee Jr and his wife Frances have been members of St Francis since 2011, where their sons, Maxwell and Matthias, were confirmed. Hal is blessed to serve on the Vestry and hosts coffee hour once in a while.*

# Friday, February 23

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Genesis 40:1-23, Psalm 54, 1 Corinthians 3:16-23, Mark 2:13-22

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I find it tricky at times to remember my identity in Christ. Days go by and the “feeling” just isn’t there. The longing for God is always there, but often I find myself lost in the day to day tasks of motherhood, appointments and health concerns...and I forget to seek God in it all. It’s easy then to feel lost or without the anchor of who I am in Christ. In today’s readings, I can relate to Joseph. He noticed when two prisoners were distraught – when he himself was a prisoner. He helped when they were in need, then he requested to be remembered by the King’s cupbearer...who promptly forgot. I wonder how Joseph felt the nearness of God as he was unjustly placed in prison then forgotten.

As I sit with David’s words knowing a little of his story, I can identify with his longing to be heard...and find myself in this season of life sacrificing a free will offering of faith that God is my helper...sustaining my life and believing God is good while praising God’s name. This is no easy task.

I wonder if Levi (a.k.a Matthew) felt forgotten like Joseph or longed to be heard like David? I choose to believe that of course he did because he was human. The beauty of Matthew’s story is a concrete invitation to follow Truth (Jesus). Jesus sacrificed his own reputation to wine and dine with sinners and even worse, tax collectors like Matthew. He was declaring that God never forgets – even people that others would like to pretend don’t exist – God always hears – God also takes our sacrifices of praise in faith to make us vessels strong enough for the new wine of Christ in us. The new freedom to fully embrace Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 3, “The Spirit of God lives in us. We are God’s temple.” We are seen, known, heard, and loved. That is who we are.

When I find it tricky to remember how loved I am by God, I pray that I remember to sacrifice my doubt for faith and look to find God in my surroundings while also Including Scripture, which gives example after example of people who longed for God just like I do.



*Most days, you can find Angie Witt volunteering at her boys’ school, on a sports’ field, advocating for mental health, having a heartfelt conversation with another human, and/or walking her family’s dog, Jasa, by the ocean. Life is never dull. It’s beautiful.*



# Saturday, February 24

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Genesis 41:1-13, Psalm 138 or 139, 1 Corinthians 4:1-7, Mark 2:23-3:6

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*“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”* Mark 2:27

In my third-grade class we read *Little House in the Big Woods* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. I love talking with my students about how life was 200 years ago, having them imagine what life would be like without Door Dash, video games, and electricity. In chapter 5, Sundays, we read about what life was like in the little log cabin on Sundays. The family would wear their best clothes and sit around the house. They weren't allowed to play, cook, or even bathe. They had to take a bath the day before, and Ma had them eat cold food since she couldn't cook or bake. At one point, Laura can't stand it and she goes to play with her dog, Jack. Instead of punishing her, Pa tells her a story of a time when her grandfather got in trouble for playing on a Sunday.

I am glad we have moved beyond the time of *Little House*. Sometimes we need that Sunday to relax and reset. I like to wake up before the rest of the house and have my coffee and read my paper. When we go to church, I feel like I'm getting a lesson and a boost to the start of my week. If I'm lucky, I might get to rest on the sofa with a good book, or take a nap. Alex will make us a great dinner, and there are usually leftovers that I can pack into lunch boxes for Monday. For some of us, Sunday might mean going to a kid's baseball game, doing the laundry, helping with homework or chores. This is ok! I've been there! Sunday was made for us. We have it to recharge and make us better for the week ahead. We might have to do laundry and grocery shopping so that we can be there for our families the rest of the week. Use your Sunday for what you need, and remember God made it for you, and thank Him.



*Jennifer Sams is a daughter, wife, mom, teacher, and lover of cats. When she isn't visiting Lauren in Oregon and Emma in Kentucky, you can find her quilting, knitting, taking walks with Alex, or watching William at all of his sporting and school events.*



Sunday,  
FEBRUARY 25

Psalms 46:2,3

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

# Monday, February 26

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Genesis 41:46-57, Psalm 64 or 65, 1 Corinthians 4:8-21, Mark 3:7-19a

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*“Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the scheming of evildoers, who whet their tongues like swords, who aim bitter words like arrows, shooting from ambush at the blameless; they shoot suddenly and without fear. . . . But God will shoot his arrow at them; they will be wounded suddenly. Because of their tongue he will bring them to ruin. . . . Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him. Let all the upright in heart glory.”*

Psalm 64: 2-4,7-8a, and 10

One of the things that most impressed me when I first came to St. Francis were the words on the columns of the patio and on the banners on the altar: “Love God, Love Others, Serve the World”. These seven little words define what we Christians are supposed to do, how we are supposed to live, i.e., our role here on earth as defined by Jesus. In the 21st century and in the United States, we are not forced to be Christians. Being a Christian is a choice that each of us actively makes, and most of us, I believe, feel chosen by God to be a disciple of Christ.

Three of today’s readings address the subject of being chosen by God/ Jesus for a particular role. In the reading from Genesis, Joseph has been placed by Pharaoh over all the land of Egypt because Joseph, through God, has correctly interpreted Pharaoh’s dream of the seven fat cows and full ears of grain followed by the seven thin cows and blighted ears of grain. The reading tells of Joseph storing up the grain during the plentiful years and feeding the people during the famine years. The subject of the readings from Mark and 1 Corinthians is being chosen as an apostle. Mark tells the story of Jesus choosing the twelve apostles to be sent out to proclaim His message. Paul was chosen by Jesus on the road to Damascus and in 1 Corinthians cites the hardships of being an apostle. All three of these roles could be accomplished only with God’s guidance.

Choosing to be a Christian can be difficult in these times, with much criticism of the Christian faith and Christian behavior in the media and with anti-religious sentiment in the culture. But with God’s help, we can do our best in carrying out the role defined by Christ using, for example, prayer, worship, fellowship, and studying God’s word to help us and acting with love in all we do. “Love God, Love Others, Serve the World”—These are the things we are chosen by God to do.

*Suellen Eslinger joined St. Francis on-line in 2020 and became a member in 2021. She is a retired Aerospace engineer. Her principal hobby is music, and she sings in the St. Francis choir and plays the recorder. She loves learning about the Word of God.*

# Tuesday, February 27

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Genesis 42:18-28, Psalm 119:73-96, 1 Corinthians 5:9-6:8, Mark 4:1-20

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*“For whoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.” Mark 3:35*

Jesus was talking with the crowd answering questions posed, including the scribes who were doing their best to ensnare Him, when he got a message His mother and brother were at the back of the crowd wanting to see Him. Jesus then told the crowd that all of them who do the will of God are His mother, brother, and sister. I doubt everyone in the crowd was doing the will of God. I’m sure many did not yet believe in Him and were there out of curiosity. But I think Jesus was letting them know He loved each of them and looked past their sinfulness, guiding them to do God’s will... that is to repent, believe in Him and love one another.

I’ve come to understand Jesus does not expect us to be perfect. He looks past our faults and wants us to repent, believe in Him and love each other. I’m not sure about you but it helps me relate to things when I use examples. For instance, in my family there have been instances when someone has done something or said something I consider wrong. They’ve hurt me or someone else, but overall they are good people, believe in God and are genuinely sorry. Rather than keeping a “stone in my heart”, not forgiving them, I have to look past their faults, let go of the hurt, and love them as they are. Thinking of this reminds me this is what God does with me. He sent His Son to us to offer us redemption and show us what love and forgiveness are all about. No matter what, if we repent, believe, and love Him, He loves us as His family.

I enjoy listening to Christian Rock. Some of my favorite words from a song by Mercy Me, are “I hear a voice and He calls me redeemed”; and “greater is the One living inside of me than he who is living in the world”. This Lent I pray I hear His voice, love others the way He loves me and be able to reflect the One living inside of me.



*I've been a member of St. Francis since 1997. I grew up in the Midwest and ventured out to sunny California in 1986. I was fortunate to meet my husband here and when we moved to Palos Verdes I found St. Francis. I'm retired and basically so is he. We enjoy hiking, traveling and have seen many, many National Parks and other beautiful areas of this and other countries. I enjoy being part of this wonderful church family and working together volunteering to help whenever I can. Mary Ann Cronin.*

# Wednesday, February 28

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Genesis 42:18-28, Psalm 119:73-96, 1 Corinthians 5:9-6:8, Mark 4:1-20

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I am focusing on verses 73-96 of Psalm 119. As many of you might know, Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible, consisting of 22 groups of eight verses, with each group's verses starting with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

This rigorous linguistic design might sound like merely a quirky choice for a piece of writing until you dive into the words and see that the author is extolling the virtues of God's law, commandments, precepts, and Word. In other words, rule and order. It seems to me that the author is imposing this tight structure on himself, as a writer, as an example and demonstration of what it looks like to submit to an external set of guidelines or constraints. The author is showing how well this approach works as he guides the reader to receive his message; he wants the reader to experience order as the words and verses are read. His message is to live a life according to God's rules, which in the author's experience bring joy, comfort, hope, and much, much more. The psalm's structure is consistent with and serves to strengthen this message.

Furthermore, the author is realistic and doesn't claim that living according to God's guidance results in a life free of pain. This psalm is not without recognition of the struggles we face in our lives and in fact it's far from it. The author refers to much agony that he has endured and will continue to endure. But, in the midst of all the turmoil, he is so steeped in God's Word that he is able to persevere. These two verses really bring that point home:

*"If your law had not been my delight,  
I would have perished in my misery."*

What a great testament to cultivating a faith in God and retaining it in our hearts. What an endorsement for spending precious time getting closer to God and internalizing His Word to fortify us against this life's perils. If we don't make it a life-long practice to draw near to God's commandments and deeply internalize His Word, where will we turn to in times of trouble?



*Fabrizio Pelá has been a parishioner at St. Francis for over 20 years. He and his wife Kristina enjoy participating in various aspects of parish life, connecting with the wonderful people of this blessed church community, and receiving spiritual nourishment that keeps life's challenges in perspective.*

# Thursday, February 29

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Genesis 42:29-38, Psalm 74, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Mark 4:21-34

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*“(The kingdom of God) is like a mustard seed, which, when thrown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs . . .”* Mark 4:31-32

Following the very wet weather we had in 2023, the parklands in my area became vast seas of green as the sun caused seeds in the ground to germinate and grow. Most prolific of all were the mustard plants which grew to heights of around 7-8 feet tall. What an amazing tangible example of Jesus’ parable!

Metaphorically, it brings to my mind how what each of us says and does in our encounters with others can have lasting effects on those people that we might never know about. Have you ever had friends or acquaintances recall a conversation or event that has stayed with them and has influenced them in some way? Often, when this happens, you have completely forgotten the incident. On the other hand, we all sometimes get immediate gratitude from others that what we did or said has helped them in some way.

I am a longtime volunteer at Torrance Memorial Medical Center and formerly a patient representative, where I visited patients in their rooms and had the time to converse with them for a few minutes. Most often, they thanked me for the company and for any small service I provided: getting a warm blanket or other personal items or putting them in touch with a staff member who might solve a problem for them. When I returned from being furloughed during Covid, that program was discontinued and I am now a “Wayfinder” in the front lobby, guiding patients and visitors to the department or room that they need to find. In the short time that I’m with them, we often have brief conversations. They most always thank me for helping them through the maze of the hospital, but as was the case when I was a patient rep, I may never know if my smile or empathy had a larger, positive effect (the small “seed” producing a larger “plant”). I would hope that at least they got the impression that TMMC is a friendly, compassionate place. This reminds me of Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:40 when He was speaking about rewards in the kingdom of heaven, *“Truly I tell you, when you did it (an act of kindness) to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”*



*Laurie Anderson has been an active member of St. Francis for over 20 years, regularly attending the 8:00 services. She has lived in PVE for 50 years, has two grown sons and three grandchildren, and now lives alone since the passing of her husband of 57 years, Keith, in 2021.*

# Friday, March 1

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Genesis 43:1-15, Psalm 73, 1 Corinthians 7:1-9, Mark 4:35-41

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*“He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’”* Mark 4:39-40

Our 21-year-old daughter Sofia works at a group home for girls aged 13-18 who have been trafficked and/or come from broken homes and are accustomed to gang culture. Most days, I can keep my concerns about her safety at bay, but there have been several occasions where I’ve found myself playing out horrible, worst-case scenarios. I don’t recommend it.

Now there’s worry, and then there’s distress, and recently I was quickly heading toward the latter regarding an issue between Sofia and one of her violent clients. As I found myself in a downward spiral of anxiety, knowing there was nothing I could do to extract Sofia from the situation, I found myself realizing there’s nothing I could do but pray. Well ... duh! So I did. Fervently. I asked the Holy Spirit to please work within the tension between Sofia and this girl and to soften the girl’s heart so there would be no threat to Sofia’s safety. In doing so, I released it all into God’s hands. (Not like it was ever in my hands to begin with, but it sure was in my head – over, and over, and over ...) And though my prayer may not have (as far as I knew) resolved the issue right away, what it did resolve for me personally was a calming of my frantic being. The doomsday voices in my mind were quieted; my anxious heart was stilled.

But wait, there’s more! Lo and behold, during Sofia’s next shift, this gang-banging adolescent apologized to her, something I consider quite miraculous, actually. But whether or not the apology happened, the question “Do you still have no faith?” gives me pause. I do have faith. So why do I allow myself to get so spun up sometimes? I do it more often than I’d like to admit. Perhaps I can do a better job of remembering those simple words: “Quiet! Be still!” whenever I begin the spiral of worry and allow myself to be quieted and stilled by praying for the Spirit’s intercession. Instead of allowing my worries to wreak havoc in my mind, may I quiet the noise and still the havoc by leaning into my faith.



*Kristina Pelá and her husband Fabrizio have been attending St. Francis 24 years. Kristina serves as Pastoral Care Shepherd and relishes leading monthly Taizé services. When she isn’t involved in church-related activities, Kristina enjoys playing tennis, taking walks with Fabrizio, and catching up with their children Tavio (24) and Sofia (21).*

# Saturday, March 2

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Genesis 43:16-34, Psalm 27, 1 Corinthians 7:10-24, Mark 5:1-20

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## *Reflection on Psalm 27*

I will trust in the Lord.

Teach me dear Lord in all your ways. I know that I will see the path in this life. All the days of this life will I devote to you.

The peace that passes all understanding is shattered. Yet my trust in you holds firm.

I have faith and do not despair.

I want and need only one thing. To live in your house forever. To be with you and find in you your glory.

Hear me, Lord. Be merciful and gracious.

I will triumph over my enemies. Keep them at bay and let me be free.

When my father and mother are distressed, hear their cries for help. Let them know your word and save them.

Always keep your word and be with me.

I will trust in the Lord.

The Lord is my light. I shall fear no one. My enemies will be long gone to oblivion.

Do not leave me to my own devices. Teach me your ways.

Protect me, dear Lord and keep me free from fear.

When time comes and I walk through your fields of waving grain, I'll think of you and know that I will always trust in you.



*John H. Dingee, Jr. has been a member at St. Francis since 2003. During that time, he has been a member of vestry, a reader, an usher, and a librarian. He gives thanks for his children Hal and Jenny and his grandchildren Samantha, Mike, Erin, and AJ.*



# Sunday, March 3

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;  
God will help it when the morning dawns.

Psalm 46:4,5



NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL, PARIS

# Monday, March 4

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Genesis 44:18-34, Psalm 77, 1 Corinthians 7:25-31, Mark 5:21-43

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The unhoused man across the counter from me at the men's closet at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Long Beach needed pants, size 32, preferably jeans. The clothes he was wearing were dirty and his spare clothing had been stolen. But he had arrived late in the morning clothing give-away, and there were no pants left in his size. "Can you wear a size 34?" I asked. He sighed and looked over the few remaining pants, chose one pair and some tee-shirts, and left. I turned to the next client and thought longingly of the comfortable lunch I would enjoy with friends in Palos Verdes that afternoon. Like many affluent and comfortably housed residents of Los Angeles, I was becoming increasingly cynical about helping the homeless and increasingly tired of trying to help. The problems seemed much greater than any possible solution.

I could have taken some inspiration from Mark 5:21-43, which focuses on two iconic miracles where desperate people cross boundaries and seek healing from Jesus: Jairus, a Jewish leader who asks Jesus to heal his dying daughter, and an unnamed woman who interrupts Jesus to seek healing from long-term bleeding by simply touching his robe. The woman is healed and the daughter of Jairus, thought to be dead, arises from her bed as Jesus calls servants to give her something to eat.

I don't think these stories are here just to teach us more about the power of Jesus to perform miracles; we know he has the power to do anything. I think they are part of the Gospel of Mark because of what they teach us about ordinary people who take their faith to extraordinary levels. Neither Jairus nor the unnamed suffering woman give up in the face insurmountable odds. Jesus tells the woman, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Too often it is easy for us to give up on ourselves, give up on other people, and give up on the crises in our world that don't have easy solutions, including racism, homelessness, and violence. But Jesus calls us away from cynicism and despair. He asks us, always, to let faith heal and to use our faith to love ourselves and to love others.



A retired English teacher, Gayle Taylor has been part of the St. Francis community for forty years and currently serves on Altar Guild and as Outreach Minister. She enjoys reading, hiking, cooking, and traveling with her friend, Joe Young.

# Tuesday, March 5

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Genesis 45:1-15, Psalm 78, 1 Corinthians 7:32-40, Mark 6:1-13

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These verses from Mark, Chapter 6, discuss two different descriptions of Jesus' ministries. In verses 1 through 6, Jesus returns to his hometown, the twelve disciples in tow, and preaches in the temple. The townspeople were initially impressed. But when they realized who he was, they were offended. After all, he was just a carpenter. Where had he gained all this knowledge?

Jesus himself was taken aback by this rejection. He said, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." And Jesus continued his ministry, even though he could do no "mighty" work in his hometown, aside from healing a few sick people. Jesus then continued teaching in villages nearby.

In verses 7 through 13 Jesus called his twelve disciples and instructed them to go forth, in pairs, and he gave them power over unclean spirits. He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a staff or walking stick, no bread, no money and only one tunic. He further instructed the disciples to wear only sandals. He said to them that if they are welcome, and abide in a house, then stay there until they leave. If they are not welcome, as they leave they are to shake off the dust from their sandals. (Jesus clearly is so angry that he says, "It would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for a city that does not receive you.")

When Jesus went forward according to his instructions, he preached that people should repent, and cast out devils and heal the sick.

My experiences go both ways. There have been times when I was disappointed that people around me refused to appreciate my wisdom. How dare they? But there were those occasions when I refused to acknowledge someone else's point of view. My King James Bible uses the word "should" when I say repent and cast out my devils. This is hard to do. Another takeaway for me is that the importance of accepting travelers is not limited to Christian venues.



*Joe Young is a longtime friend of Gayle Taylor. He has been active with the work of St. Francis Episcopal Church, especially with the St. Luke's Breakfast Program. Joe is also a world traveler, having been to all the continents (including Antarctica), all fifty states, all the oceans, and he has ascended to the summits of approximately 400 mountains. He also is an avid culture nut.*

# Wednesday, March 6

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Genesis 45:16-28, Psalm 81 or 82, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, Mark 6:13-29

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In our reading today, I wonder: why did Joseph expect his entire family including his father would uproot themselves and move to Egypt? I understand that there was food, but leaving their land was a really big deal. I wonder why Joseph gave Benjamin 300 pieces of silver and 5 changes of clothing – more than he gave to his other brothers? Previously, Joseph said that he forgave his brothers, yet I wonder if Benjamin was favored because he was the only one who was innocent in the plot to get rid of Joseph. It is also true that Joseph and Benjamin were full brothers as they shared the same mother and father... yet Joseph knew that jealousy among his brothers had been an issue in the past. I wonder why Joseph made the choices he did. I wonder if this had anything to do with his request as his brothers went on their way to retrieve the rest of their family including Jacob... "Don't argue on the way."

Why would they argue? Would it be over "what really happened" so long ago? Would they argue over how to tell Jacob that Joseph was still alive? Would they argue over the storyline they would share hoping that Joseph wouldn't tell their father how he ended up in Egypt? Would they argue over Benjamin and the favor he was shown? Would they argue over Benjamin knowing the truth about what his older brothers had done?

It's interesting that Joseph would instruct them not to argue on the way back to their father. Perhaps he was concerned about further family division. Perhaps he wanted to spare Benjamin knowing the truth about what really happened in order to preserve whatever bond he may have shared with his brothers. Whatever the reason, Joseph spoke the words and then waited for the return of his whole family.

Often when I read Scripture, I end up having so many questions. Much of my time is asking questions with few answers...in those moments, I look for God's qualities throughout the story that point toward the bigger picture of God. Love.

So I think of the overwhelming disbelief then joy that Jacob would feel, the longing to race to his son to be able to hug and to hold once again. And I think of my children. I would do anything and everything to get to them. I would uproot everything to see their faces and wrap my arms around them.

Then, I see God...with maternal arms that enfold, an undistracted unwavering embrace wrapping around my own shoulders in the life seasons of drought. Even when I have so many questions while reading Scripture, one thing I can never argue is how much God loves.



*For more about Angie Witt, see p.16*

# Thursday, March 7

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Genesis 46:1-7,28-34, Psalm 85 or 86, 1 Corinthians 9:1-15, Mark 6:30-46

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*“And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, “Jacob! Jacob!”*

*“Here I am,” he replied.”* Genesis 46:1-2

*“Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name”* Psalm 86:11

*“Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.”* Mark 6:39-40

I began my reflection writing with a prayer, then read through the verse choices for my chosen day and “Boom”, the Lord hits me with the concept of direction. Yes. Not only direction to get down to writing, but also in the scriptures.

In Genesis, when Jacob replies, “Here I am” God directs him in clear words not to be afraid to go down to Egypt and that God will go with him.

I read Psalm 86 in a few translations. The Living Bible puts it in familiar words for me.

*“Tell me where you want me to go and I will go there. May every fiber of my being unite in reverence to your name.”*

Sometimes I am afraid of not hearing, desiring or being passionate about doing God’s will. Verse 11 is part of my prayers each night followed by the request for the energy, the will, the clarity to follow that direction.

The gospel story of the feeding of the five thousand has Jesus directing the disciples to have groups of people sit down on the green grass. Actually, the word “green” is what caught my eye. Don’t just sit down but sit down on the green grass. That feels significant.

God’s direction is there for my asking and He will be with me. I can trust the Lord and it will be good.

*“Lord, please help me be open to your direction, to ask for it, to listen for it, not to fear it. Let me trust that you will guide me, energize me, help me to follow your will and to know that with your direction and help I will be led to green pastures.”*



*Susie and Steve Willigrod have been attending St Francis for about 10 years. Susie came for the choir, but they have found the entire church to be a loving home.*

# Friday, March 8

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Genesis 47:1-26, Psalm 91 or 92, 1 Corinthians 9:16-27, Mark 6:47-56

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*“For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all ... I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.”*

1 Corinthians 9:19, 23

In her book, *1 Corinthians: Searching the Depths of God*, Jaime Clark-Soles offers insights into this epistle from Paul. She explains how the Corinthians were facing a host of issues but to Paul, there was one solution, adopt the Logic of the Cross. Per Clark-Soles:

“What’s at stake for Paul here is that we live with intention, on purpose, logically—not just with any intention or purpose or logic, but with that which derives from the values on display in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”

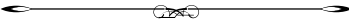
In 1 Corinthians chapters 8-10, Paul elaborates on the implications of the Logic of the Cross. In today’s passage from chapter 9, he specifically addresses how we are to use the privileges and freedoms we are blessed with. His advice remains highly relevant today as we witness a rising number of passionate debates over what citizens should and should not be allowed to do based on the freedoms protected by the Constitution.

Simply put, according to Paul, the Logic of the Cross suggests we should use our rights and freedoms to do what’s best for the common good. Paul’s examples of becoming all things to all people (verses 20-22) guide us to adopt the mind of Christ, humble ourselves, and attend to the interests of others ahead of our own.

In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul acknowledges that the Logic of the Cross is at odds with the logic of the world. Clark-Soles encapsulates Paul’s thinking as follows:

“What seems wise to the world (looking out for number one; acting as though your choices don’t affect others; the one who dies with the most toys wins) is actually foolishness by God’s standards. What seems foolish to the world (compassion and connection; regarding each person as equally valuable regardless of social status; following a crucified Messiah) is wisdom in God’s estimation.”

In a nutshell, today’s passage calls us to ponder how we can use what we have been blessed with to serve others.



*Jack Hailwood is a cradle Episcopalian and former Adult Bible Study co-leader. Jack is retired and along with his wife, Frances, has been a member of St. Francis for nearly six years.*

# Saturday, March 9

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Genesis 47:27-48:7, Psalm 136, 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Mark 7:1-23

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*“Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”*

Mark 7:14-15

Do you ever crave something that isn't good for you? For me it's chocolate, though anything with copious amounts of sugar will do!

It's easy to see what indulgences are physically unhealthy for me, but what do I indulge in that's spiritually unhealthy? I don't have to search too hard to know it's holding on to bitterness. If I scrutinize why, I recognize I derive satisfaction from my belief that “I'm right.”

But just like indulging in a slab of Mud Pie isn't the best nutritional choice, deciding “I'm right, so I don't really need to forgive -- being civil is good enough” isn't always the best spiritual choice. So as tempting as it is to sometimes savor my warped sense of self-righteousness, it is allowing that bitterness to reside in my heart that defiles me. No matter how delicious the taste of believing I'm justified is, the fact is I'm choosing not to let my heart operate at its full capacity to love.

As I struggle with my sweet tooth, I try to alter my craving and choose something better for me. Spiritually, I need to alter the craving in my heart when it bends toward the negative. Instead of satisfying my craving to be right, may I crave doing what is right. And that is spreading God's Love into this world instead of clinging to foolish pride or whatever else may prevent my doing so.

People will hurt us, disappoint us, and frustrate the heck out of us. But as Christ says in the verse above, there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile. As much as I may want to blame others for issues in our relationships, the actual root of the problem is the hardening of my heart towards those I believe have wronged me. It doesn't matter how it started or why it continued; what matters is that it stops. And it stops by my embracing people with undefiled Love.



*Kristina Pelá and her husband Fabrizio have been attending St. Francis 24 years. Kristina serves as Pastoral Care Shepherd and leads her Lenten weekly Taizé services. When she isn't involved in church-related activities, Kristina enjoys playing tennis, taking walks with Fabrizio, and catching up with the children Tavio (24) and Sofia (21).*

# Sunday, March 10

The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Come, behold the works of the Lord;  
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.





# Monday March 11

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Genesis 49:1-28, Psalm 89, 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1, Mark 7:24-37

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As I sit meditating on the scripture appointed for today our nation is celebrating the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We are collectively reflecting on how things have changed for the better and sadly, how they have not.

Like us, Jesus had encounters with people who were “other” to him. The woman Jesus encounters in Mark 7:24-37 is completely different from him. In Jesus’ time she had none of the standing that would have allowed her to approach him. A woman, a Gentile, and a Pagan with a disabled daughter would have been completely disqualified from approaching a devout Jewish rabbi.

But approach she does, asking him to heal her daughter with the bravery of a desperate parent.

At first, Jesus rebukes her, saying, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” Indicating that she has no status to ask for his blessing ahead of the devout Jews of his followers. Boldy, she argues back, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

With her statement what she is NOT saying to Jesus is, “give me what I deserve because of my goodness”. What she is saying is, “give me what I deserve because of your goodness.” Jesus relents in the face of her faith and the child is healed. With this blessing of a woman so completely other to Jesus we get a powerful foreshadowing of the radically inclusive nature of our Christian faith. Jesus comes for the marginalized, broken, lost, sick, sinful wherever we are. He comes to us all despite all the ways that we are “other” in the divided world we live in.

Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of freedom in his historic “I Have a Dream” speech. I have the idea that the freedom we still seek today can be found by the world leaning deeply into God’s grace and healing. Jesus wants us to have hearts that are healed so that we can go forward to heal others as we seek to build His kingdom.



*Holly Valiquette has been a member of St. Francis for nearly 3 decades. She is deeply grateful for the loving and inclusive nature of the Episcopal Church.*

# Tuesday, March 12

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Genesis 49:29-50:14, Psalm 94, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Mark 8:1-10

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Paul's letter scolds the Corinthians for behavior he says abuses the Lord's last supper. The people Paul addresses were getting drunk and falling asleep at their commemorative dinners. Their behavior generally disrespected the model that Jesus had set for them. At the last supper he had instructed his apostles and all of us who came after them to offer our suppers in memory of him and the sacrifice he was about to make for us.

This makes me think of our St. Francis Nurture group. When our Nurture group meets once a month, we begin with a prayer to remind us why we've gathered. Then we have a light dinner with dishes prepared by each of us. As we eat, we check in with each other, listening in friendship and camaraderie. Dinner ends with "Communion," which for us means reading together the Eucharistic Prayer and then offering each other first a piece of bread as we say to them, "The bread of heaven" and then a sip of wine saying, "The cup of eternal life." By the end of each of our suppers, we know it has been a remembrance of a sacred evening for Jesus and his followers.

Each meeting, especially since it begins in this way, is meaningful to me. What comes next keeps Jesus in my mind as our group moves on to contemplating whatever we have chosen to study for that night. We end our meetings often with Lectio Divina or another group prayer. I always come away filled with good feelings that only come from this spiritual connection.



*Sue Egan was born and raised in southern California into a large family. Their lives revolved around their faith community and family, old-fashioned values. When she had her three children, she raised them with those values she cherished. Now they all have families and have worked hard to raise their children with solid values also. Sue and her husband Richard are fortunate to live close to their children and grandkids, and they work to support them while maintaining a close family. Sue loves St. Francis and the community here because the theme of the parish is to love God and others. Every week Jason reminds us that, though we often have struggles, Jesus loves us and shows us through his words and example the way out of darkness.*

# Wednesday, March 13

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Genesis 50:15-26, Psalm 119:121-144, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Mark 8:11-26

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In this passage from Corinthians, Paul tells the Church of Corinth that the Holy Spirit manifests itself in different ways among them for the common good. He speaks of disparate gifts and different kinds of service through which we serve God, and the world. It is a good passage for reminding us that we're not all the same and aren't meant to be.

As a teacher, I get this. I often tell my students that they won't be good at everything, even though we live in a community that expects that. In their writing, I tell them that there are a hundred ways to be great, and even more to be acceptable. I remind them that not all writing has to be the same for it to be good—it's the opposite. They have to find their way to greatness by pursuing what their natural talents (gifts for our purposes) allow. I encourage them to find what works for them in their writing and perfect it.

It's not much different really in service of God and each other. We're not all preachers, healers, or, I dare say, prophets. But that's not the sum total of the gifts of the Spirit, nor does Paul give us an exhaustive list here. If there are a hundred ways to be a great writer, there are more ways to be wonderful child of God. I look at our church body and see so many examples of wildly different gifts. Some of us are good at greeting people, others can be depended on to pray with those in need, still others find a way to serve God in our kitchen, and, near as I can see, these are all gifts, all necessary, all important, and all Holy. Experience teaches me (again and again as I'm slow to learn) that everyone has a part and that everyone's gifts need to be acknowledged, called out in a good way, and honored. We don't all have the same skills in service of God, but they're all needed.



*Tim Coleman is an English teacher at Palos Verdes Peninsula High School. He has been a member of St. Francis for the last 9 years.*

# Thursday, March 14

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Exodus 1:6-22, Psalm 73, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, Mark 8:27-9:1

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*“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.”*

1 Corinthians 12:12

The apostle Paul in this passage was writing to a divided group of leaders in Corinth and using this familiar analogy to promote unity for the church and guide them to re-focus on Christ. In a clear and pragmatic style, Paul lays out a strong case for the leaders to change their ways, because they can all relate to what he is saying. He reminds them that the body is purposely designed to have very different parts with dissimilar characteristics and functions, with each part being just as important in ensuring a properly functioning body.

Paul makes his message so easy to grasp. Who hasn't so much as twisted an ankle and had to rely more on the other limbs and increased visual coordination? Didn't that occurrence make it clear that our lonely forgotten ankle is pretty critical after all? Paul presses the point that all members, even the “inferior” ones, as he puts it, have value, and that the other members, including the “more respectable” ones cannot do well without them. His subtext is that arrogance should be avoided, warning that those who would look down upon others may come to regret it.

One of the things I've always appreciated about our St. Francis church community is the variety of talents that the individual members possess. We come from all walks of life with quite diverse experiences and skills. But more importantly, it's impressive how freely our members bring their talents to bear in every aspect of the church. We are not perfect, but we are not Corinth either, and most times we do strive to heed Paul's message such that our differences complement one another and result in a unified endeavor based on Christ's teachings. Let's pray that our church continues to keep Jesus front and center and that all body parts stay healthy!



*Fabrizio Pelá has been a parishioner at St. Francis for over 20 years. He and his wife Kristina enjoy participating in various aspects of parish life, connecting with the wonderful people of this blessed church community, and receiving spiritual nourishment that keeps life's challenges in perspective.*

# Friday, March 15

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Exodus 2:1-22, Psalm 107, 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3, Mark 9:2-13

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*“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3

I love this passage from Corinthians and, to me, it summarizes the love we have for each other at St. Francis. It is wonderful to realize all the amazing talents and personal stories that exist in our congregation. When we first came to St. Francis our family sat in the same place in church each Sunday (well, like most of us, we still do that!) and the gentleman that sat in front of us was always friendly and chatty but our conversations rarely went beyond small talk. Our priest at the time developed a program where parishioners could elect to reach out to some people that they did not know well and schedule one on one meetings in hopes of building some stronger connections. I was paired up with this gentleman and we met for coffee. I was worried that I wouldn't have much to say and hoped he would feel the time was well spent. However, after just a few minutes I realized there was nothing to worry about, and after two hours I couldn't believe how fast the time had flown by. And now he was not just the gentleman who sat in front of us at church, he was a World War Two hero who had been in the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was a man who had a rich and wonderful career and family life, and it made me realize we each have our unique story that can inspire others.

Here at St. Francis we have passionate teachers that inspire future musicians, dancers, scholars and leaders. We have gifted artists that grace our world with their drawings, paintings textiles and sculptures. We have astute business people who are masters in finance, accounting, legal work and real estate. We have community volunteers, athletes, chefs, singers, librarians, counselors and scientists - and so many more. And, all of these parts come together to make the whole of St. Francis. Each individual comes with his or her gifts to share with the whole and all parts are appreciated and revered. We are all different but are unified in our love of Jesus Christ and his message to love one another.



*Mary Deley and her husband Tony live in Rancho Palos Verdes. Along with their three adult children, Adelaide, Clara and Will, they have been members of St. Francis for over 20 years.*

# Saturday, March 16

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Exodus 2:23-3:15, Psalm 108, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Mark 9:14-29

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When mulling over these verses, the thing that stuck out to me was the idea of promise ... a true promise, and a failing one. In the bible- promises take form as prophecy, covenant, word spoken from God. God makes promises to us, and we make promises back.

In the world I live in, a promise is often a letdown. Human promises don't always mean much. Think of the breakup songs! But God keeps promises, even though it takes time -- a lot of time. In Exodus, the Israelites fear He has forgotten His promise to them and they cry out in suffering. God appears to Moses and promises to honor the covenant made long ago. I will lead you out of Egypt and not forsake you, I will be with you. The idea of a promised land is referenced again in Psalm 108. The Psalmist is feeling the sting of being lost, needing direction. The psalm ends that God must give aid because human help is worthless. In Mark, God helps a boy, unlike the human teachers of the law who argue, stuck in a human cycle of blame. Yet the father in the parable pledges to believe and asks for help for his unbelief. That promise, even though it is so human, moves Jesus to save the boy.

In these verses, promise is what unites us with God. But how do we live out promises? Day to day life is so difficult. God has an idea for that, too-1 Corinthians 13 reminds us that without love, our words (our broken promises?) are just noise. A popular reading for weddings, we return to it again and again because if we don't endeavor for love, actions are broken promises. But with love, they are eternal. They take on beauty and resonance.

Promise is a huge part of our relationship with God because promises push and pull and require patience, but isn't love worth it? And as Ruth Gordon told us in Harold & Maude, "Go and love some more!"

*Joy Bacon has deep love for St. Francis because of its long connection to her family. She enjoys singing with the choir, supporting students with the Scholarship Fund, and cooking with the Friars.*

Sunday,  
March 17



He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.

Psalms 46:9

# Monday, March 18

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Exodus 4:10-31, Psalm 35, 1 Corinthians 14:1-19, Mark 9:30-41

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*“Moses said to the Lord, ‘Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.’” Exodus 4:10*

*“Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” Exodus 4:12*

It is not human nature for us to want someone to put words in our mouth. In fact, our response to someone doing that to us is typically an emphatic, “Stop!” But in the case of intercessory prayer, I ask God to put words in my mouth every single time.

I serve on the Intercessory Prayer team, making myself available to pray with individuals in the Nason Chapel after Communion; I write the prayers for our Taizé services and our confidential Prayer Chain when I receive prayer requests. I pray for and with people often.

But I don’t ever do it alone. I invite the Holy Spirit to be a part of the prayer before it even happens. I ask God to help me get out of His way – yes, those are literally the very words I pray, “Please, help me get out and stay out of Your way” – so I don’t concern myself with saying “just the right thing” and instead allow myself to be an open vessel to what I am receiving from the person coming to me and leaning into how God would have me respond. I have to say, it’s a terrific way to take the pressure off oneself!

I believe it is when we don’t try too hard to do something perfectly ourselves that God does some of His best work, for He allows us to partner with Him, working within us and between us and for us. I encourage you to remember this the next time you’re hesitant to reach out to someone because you “don’t know what to say.” Try reaching out to the Holy Spirit before you demur, and trust that God will equip you, you just need to step aside and give Him space.



*Kristina Pelá remembers the first time she was asked to pray out loud. She was serving as a Youth Leader on a ski trip for the St. Francis high school youth group. Little did she know that fulfilling that teenager’s prayer request was her first step toward eventually praying for others out loud on a weekly basis!*



# Tuesday, March 19

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Exodus 5:1-6:1, Psalm 124 or 125, 1 Corinthians 14:20-33a,39-40, Mark 9:42-50

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*“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people.”* Psalm 125:1-2

The images of mountains in these verses were breathtaking to me. The first verse likens God’s people to Mount Zion (the highest hill in Jerusalem) while the second verse points to God as like the much higher ring of mountains that surround Jerusalem to offer protection and safety.

These verses made me recall a summer long ago when I was 16 years old. In mid-August, a few weeks before we were to return to school, my father took the four older children on a hiking expedition into the back country of central Washington. We hiked up and over Bear Pass and crossed several glaciers the first day, camped overnight at Grizzley Lake, and the next evening ended up camping at Panhandle Lake, about 20 miles into the wilderness. It is a beautiful alpine lake surrounded by high mountain peaks that do a good job of isolating it from the outside world. We camped in that beautiful place for an entire week, during which we saw only a group of three other hikers passing through. The inner peace that I took home after that week is what I recall the most. Only now do I fully appreciate my father’s wisdom to help prepare us for the coming school year.

This memory let me fast-forward to 2024. We have all heard of someone suffering from “burn-out”, when one becomes spiritually worn down from the stress of doing good work under pressure for too long. The spiritual healing needed is just as described in Psalm 125:2...to be surrounded by the Lord as the mountains surround Jerusalem. I found a website offering a 10-day Christian retreat for this purpose provided to missionaries who had served in difficult places in the world. The retreat was called “Breathe”. It offered them a chance to breathe, so that once refreshed they could return to their spiritual journey wherever it takes them. The retreat was at a resort in a valley surrounded by the Swiss Alps. So it is that the Lord surrounds his people to give them nourishment when they need it the most.



*Albert Zimmerman is a 30-year parishioner at St. Francis and is grateful for each of those years. He has especially enjoyed working in the Education For Ministry (EFM) program and the opportunity to help lead the Christian Family Movement (CFM) into the 21st century by serving on the Board of Directors for North America.*

# Wednesday, March 20

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Exodus 7:8-24, Psalm 128 or 129, 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6, Mark 10:1-16

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*“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers...”* John 10:7-8

Within this passage, Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” I’m no Biblical scholar but I take this to mean that we need to approach our faith with a childlike attitude.

Have you ever watched a young child experience something for the first time? It’s awe-inspiring. They experience things with their whole selves and approach new experiences with wide open eyes, wide open hearts, trust, and wonder.

It’s tough as adults to approach anything in a childlike way. We have experienced wonderful things, sure, but we’ve also experienced hurts and disappointments which can leave us less trusting and open. We have responsibilities which take a great deal of our focus and energy, so we’re rarely wholly present for any one thing.

If you can, today, try to set aside as many things as you can which keep you from experiencing life in a childlike way, and see what it feels like to approach both faith and life as a young child might, even if it’s only for a few moments. I hope you find the wonder that you see in a child’s eyes!



*Susan Tsuji came to St. Francis via the choir many years ago (she’s lost count). She enjoys almost daily walks on the local bluffs and sharing her photos on Facebook. In addition to singing tenor in the choir at St. Francis, she also sings with Los Cancioneros Master Chorale, a few virtual choirs, and seasonally with Temple Beth El. Her husband, adult daughter, cat, and tortoise round out her immediate family, and a few years ago she found previously unknown half-siblings (surprise). Ask her about it or send a friend request on Facebook to see all of those photos. She’s a bit shy, but that doesn’t mean she doesn’t want to chat.*

# Thursday, March 21

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Exodus 7:25-8:19, Psalm 140 or 142, 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, Mark 10:17-31

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*“I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. Surely the righteous will praise your name, and the upright will live in your presence.”* Psalm 140:12-13

Recently we learned that one of the less fortunate men in our community passed away in the local city park. Ironically, in the last Lenten Series I wrote about this man, Dave, our longtime friend. Dave was well known in Hermosa Beach for wandering the streets talking to himself, carrying his bags, always disheveled but clean. Jack and I would always offer to purchase his groceries whenever we saw him at Vons (usually candy and chips), or give him a few bucks, for which he was always grateful.

Psalm 140 gave me peace when I reflect on the verses, “I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. Surely the righteous will praise your name and the upright will live before you.” There was a story published in our local paper about him. Dave was an intelligent man for sure. He had a PhD and led a professional life until schizophrenia overwhelmed him.

Often our society is quick to judge the less fortunate; I am thankful that my faith has given me the insight that everybody is created equal in God’s eyes, and He is the ultimate judge in the end. As a retired Emergency Department nurse, I have always carried a soft spot in my heart for the less fortunate. All these people have a story to tell and a God-given right to be acknowledged and loved no matter what their situation may be.

May Dave come to rest in a warm, light, and the eternal life after, surrounded by others so deserving... Rest in Peace Dave!



*Sue Ferme and her husband Jack are native Angelinos. Jack grew up locally and she grew up in the San Fernando Valley. They have three sons, eight grandchildren, and a new great granddaughter; they stay close to family by traveling between Texas and Idaho. They love and miss their St. Francis family, who substitute for their out of state families.*

# Friday March 22

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Exodus 9:13-35, Psalm 141, 2 Corinthians 4:1-12, Mark 10:32-45

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“.. whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and *whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.*” Mark 10:43-44

*Over my career* I learned something simple, yet profound from each boss I worked for. My last boss was known for asking, “So what?” He pushed us beyond simply providing analysis and challenged us to derive conclusions about an appropriate response based upon what we had learned about the competitive environment. I have found such a mindset to be particularly useful when reading Scripture.

Take today’s readings for example. The message is relatively straightforward. We learn that we are called to be a light in the darkness (2 Cor 4:6) and to be a servant to others (Mark 10:43-44). Paul’s epistle reminds us we are empowered by God’s love working through us. Additionally, God’s desire is to show us mercy when we stray and to give us strength and fortitude so we can make a difference. (2 Cor 4:1,5-7)

For these passages to become manifest through us, we must ask, “So what—what are the implications of today’s readings on our actions? What is God calling each of us to do, or do differently, day-by-day? Are there things we can change so that we are better able to recognize and respond to the continual movements of the Holy Spirit within us? Are there toxic influences that pull us away from God’s presence that we need to disconnect from? In this election year, how might we support candidates striving to be dutiful public servants with policies reflecting the values taught by Jesus rather than those like the Pharaoh in today’s Exodus story who relished his power and whose heart was hardened?

May today’s passages inspire us to seek and serve God, with God’s help.



*Jack Hailwood is a cradle Episcopalian and former Adult Bible Study co-leader. Jack is retired and along with his wife, Frances, has been a member of St. Francis for nearly six years.*

# Saturday March 23

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Exodus 10:21-11:8, Psalm 42 or 43, 2 Corinthians 4:13-18, Mark 10:46-51

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*“Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’”* Mark 10:52

These words tell of a miracle of Jesus. Bartimaeus, a blind beggar sitting by the roadside, pleaded for help from Jesus as Jesus and his disciples were passing by. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus recognized that Bartimaeus’ faith was great and said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately, Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus.

A miracle like that happened to my family in the Summer of 1988. My nephew Erik, then age 16, was on a program to Costa Rica. He was in a very outlying area of the country when he developed an appendicitis. The program center in Houston called me suddenly on July 4, told me what was happening, and said there were two options: either have the operation performed in a local clinic where the facilities were very basic; or risk a rupture of the appendix while transporting Erik over a rough road to a hospital in San Jose, the capital. We spent most of the day on the phone, speaking with Houston, calling my sister Mary who was in India, and calling Erik’s father outside of Boston. Finally, at the end of the day, I told my mother, who was visiting us at the time, to go to St. Francis with her friend Frank. “Mom, we have done everything we can do. The only thing we can do now is pray.” While my mother was at St. Francis, Houston called and said that somehow, it had persuaded the Costa Rican government to open up a new highway from the outlying village to the capital and that Erik was on his way to the hospital. Erik made it in time and the operation was successful. Was that not a miracle?

Each of us should ask, “How has my faith helped me?” I live my faith through St. Francis and it has helped me in at least two ways. First, through the Church, I met my wife Sara. Former Rector Dean Farrar married us in the Chapel in 2005 and I have been very blessed by this marriage. Second, the Church is my prime social outlet, my avenue of service to others. Jesus’ words speak to me as they did to Bartimaeus.

I believe that our faith has helped each of us in many ways. We only have to think about that in order to realize it.



*Dick Briggs has been a member of St. Francis for over 40 years. He recently retired as Vestry member and Junior Warden.*



Sunday,  
March 24

'Be still, and know that I am God!  
I am exalted among the nations,  
I am exalted in the earth.'

Psalms 46:10

# Monday March 25

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Lamentations 1:1-2,6-12, Psalm 69, 2 Corinthians 1:1-7, Mark 11:12-25

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*“Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Mercies, and the God of all consolations, who consoles us in our affliction so we may console others...” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

My dad was raised a Quaker, and God called him to become an Episcopalian. He became a priest when I was 12 years old. We moved to many places. I wanted to know what priests were taught in seminary. I found that Education for Ministry (EFM) taught lay people what I wanted to know. As an adult I enrolled in the EFM program and then taught it for 6 years at St. Francis. I was stunned to learn so much.

Looking forward to 2013 when I visited my relatives in Hansville, Washington, they told me of a new museum in Suquamish. It was built in the shape of a long house, just like the shape of the traditional buildings of the Salish Indigenous peoples.

I had lived on Bainbridge Island, Washington, in the 1960s, and I was acquainted with many Indigenous people at Port Madison. I saw moms and dads and babies, but I did not see any school children my age. I asked my parents, but they never told me. Through EFM I learned that school aged indigenous children were sent to a church-run boarding school in the 1900's to become “Christian and American”. I was devastated because I lived with these people in the area of Port Madison. This information changed the way I looked at growing up.

My husband Albert and I took our children and grandchildren to the new museum run by the indigenous people, which enables them to share their culture and religion with all. The state decided to offer a small token of reconciliation and things were changed; a new museum; Puget Sound was changed to the Salish Sea and maps were changed. The people who put the children in the boarding schools were not punished. It was a good example of forgiveness and consolation. What a gift! My children and grandchildren can now embrace this new understanding of the indigenous culture. I was so grateful we could share this with them.

*Susie Zimmerman has been a member of St. Francis for 30 years. She has served on the vestry, Altar Guild, St. Anne's Guild, sings in the choir, taught the Family-to-Family Program for the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, taught EFM, and served as Diocesan delegate for St. Francis.*

# Tuesday, March 26

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Lamentations 1:17-22, Psalm 94, 2 Corinthians 1:8-22, Mark 11:27-33

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Psalm 94 has a catchy title: God the Avenger of the Righteous! Sounds like something you might see outside a big movie theater, doesn't it? And the hard-hitting verses within the Psalm certainly live up to that title. However, as we experience with much of the Bible, there are multiple subtle messages and interesting questions embedded in the carefully chosen text: why do the wicked get away with it? Why does God let it happen? When will the righteous be avenged?

The psalmist is asking these types of questions as he is seething at the rulers and judges that are abusing the people of his era by issuing unjust mandates, which especially affect the poor and the vulnerable. The author notes that the perpetrators behave as if God does not see their evil deeds, and he admonishes them that an omnipotent God that created their eyes and ears will, for sure, see and hear what they are doing and punish them in due time. Sound familiar? This Psalm is another example of how the Bible is a timeless piece of work; haven't we all considered questions like these in similar situations?

The question of timeline for punishment is answered as the author dives further into his description of God: an omniscient, patient God, interested in discerning good from evil, and ultimately upholding His law and dispensing justice. Unfortunately, especially in our era of instant gratification, it is natural for us to see an injustice and want it, or even expect it to be, immediately addressed. This sense of urgency is not new, and the psalmist felt the same way:

“O Lord, how long shall the wicked,  
how long shall the wicked exult?”

Despite the sense of helplessness and anger that the author is feeling, he understands God's eternal nature. He knows that in the present he must maintain his faith, which brings him comfort in the worst of times. He understands that, especially in times like these, the right thing to do is to continue to lean on his faith, speak the truth, live an honorable life, support justice on earth, and let God be the future ultimate judge. Amen.

*Fabrizio Pelá has been a parishioner at St. Francis for over 20 years. He and his wife Kristina enjoy participating in various aspects of parish life, connecting with the wonderful people of this blessed church community, and receiving spiritual nourishment that keeps life's challenges in perspective.*



# Wednesday, March 27

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Lamentations 2:1-9, Psalm 74, 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11, Mark 12:1-11

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*“What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.”* Mark 12:9

In John 12:27, Jesus is contemplating his upcoming death. It seems to me the human emotions inside him are fear and hopelessness. Yet, the spiritual, God, side of him conveys to us that he accepts what is to come. He must go forward in hope and faith.

Today’s readings are a wake-up call. They tell of warnings given, but not heeded, and of disastrous outcomes.

Lamentations captures the sorrow of the Hebrew people after the southern kingdom of Judah was overrun by the Babylonians in 587 BCE (following the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians in 722 BCE). Prophet after prophet had warned of the need for changes but their messages were largely ignored. Today’s passage captures the anguish of the people who felt they were being punished by God.

In Mark’s gospel, Jesus offers a parable with a clear analogy and logical conclusion. We are the tenants of God’s creation and have been instructed to care for it—both our planet and one another. If we ignore the guidance, we do so at the risk of our own peril.

These passages should not be taken as threats. We have a loving and merciful God. Why else would God become incarnate in the human form of Jesus to teach us how we are to be? As Paul explains to the Corinthians after giving the reason for his delayed visit in today’s passage: “... thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him.” (2 Corinthians 2:14)

Consider today’s readings as a constructive lesson. What warnings are we hearing? Are we paying attention, turning to God, and having the humility to change our ways?

As an example, scientists just recently declared 2023 was the hottest on record. Are we heeding the warnings and doing what’s in our power to be good stewards of God’s creation to address this problem? This is just one example. Are there others speaking to you?



*Jack Hailwood is a cradle Episcopalian and former Adult Bible Study co-leader. Jack is retired and along with his wife, Frances, has been a member of St. Francis for nearly six years.*

# Maundy Thursday, March 28

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Lamentations 2:10-18, Psalm 142 or 143, 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32, Mark 14:12-25

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A blessed Maundy Thursday to us all St. Francis. I have been given permission in this space to diverge a bit from the prescribed verses from scripture on the calendar in order to focus on love—and who better to do so, I'm sure you're thinking. The word “maundy” comes to us from the Latin for “mandate” and is synonymous with the washing of feet, which we see in John 13. In John 15:12, Christ lays down command to his disciples and to us all: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”. And there it is. Simple, right? Love is all there is. What the world needs now is love, sweet love. Love is in the air. Love, exciting and new... But is it that simple?

Most of us instinctively understand that Jesus is likely talking about “agape” love here -- unconditional. The Jesus who gives this command is the same one who asks God to forgive the people who crucified him, while he was on the cross. When we think about Maundy Thursday, it's that kind of love we're asked to emulate, the kind Jesus had for us. Jesus follows his command in John with a description in verse 13: “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”. This call that Jesus has made emerges as a serious matter when we start to look deeper.

I rightly feel so unqualified to be in a position to write about this matter to you, so I'll resort to confession. I am exceedingly bad at fulfilling this command. I sometimes, in my best moments, come close to truly loving all people, not just friends but enemies, but my best moments are fleeting. Even when I do loving things, I am often not there in my head, where I can still be angry with a person, even when helping them. And I'm not a good poker player, so it has to show. This foot washing love, the dying for your brother love, the kind of love that would allow us to forgive people who bring us harm, has to be worked on, day and night, and that's the reason we have a whole day devoted to it in the Holy Calendar. Maundy Thursday gives us a chance to renew our vow to our neighbors, friends, and enemies that we seek to love them as Christ loves us.



*Tim Coleman is an English teacher at Palos Verdes Peninsula High School. He has been a member of St. Francis for the last 9 years.*

# The Triduum



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## Good Friday, March 29

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Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33, Psalm 40, 1 Pet 1:10-20, John 13:36-38 OR John 19:38-42

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*After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds."*

John 19: 38- 39

Pharisee and Jewish leader, Nicodemus knew Jesus was from God but secretive about it because of fear of reprisal. Many times I have not spoken or acted because of the same fear. I have stayed on the sideline of situations, walked by or kept quiet when someone spoke or acted wrongly. I am like Nicodemus who was too afraid to act.

Yet, when Jesus was condemned by the pharisees unjustly and crucified by Pilate who admitted Jesus' innocence, it was Nicodemus who spoke out and came forward. It was Nicodemus who made sure Jesus' body was removed from the cross, it was Nicodemus who appeared and helped prepare Jesus' body for burial and helped bury him. Nicodemus loved Jesus, knew what had to be done and supported the disciples when fear, despair and grief overwhelmed them. The Holy Spirit gives us courage when we cannot stand back any longer.

*Contd. on next page...*

# Good Friday, March 29

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Genesis 22:1-14, Psalm 22, 1 Peter 1:10-20, John 13:36-38 OR John 19:38-42

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*Contd. from previous page...*

I remember my own times of grief and despair, when I received help from friends, family or strangers. When my mother was dying, it was a group of nurses who comforted me and supported me so I could return to her bedside. When I had an unbelievably bad car accident, a stranger appeared providing comfort and support. A bus driver slowed the bus and yelled to the police, "He was speeding!" She was a voice to be heard. These persons were like Nicodemus in my life.

When I act and speak out against injustice and unkindness, I am like Nicodemus. I remember at a previous church, I arrived to give a ride to some teens. I witnessed a supervisor grab a young man I knew and was saying unkind things, making assumptions. I was triggered and said, "Never treat a child like that." This young man said he had never heard someone stand up for him.

We are all like Nicodemus, living in an imperfect world where we find opportunity to live our authentic lives as being an example of love in the world. I find my journey with Jesus like that of Nicodemus' – full of stops and starts, forgiving and being forgiven. I am making my way to be the best I can be, knowing love and understanding when ready or not ready to be what God calls us to be.



*Reverend Celeste Stump is a deacon at St. Francis, chaplain at The Canterbury, mother, grandmother, friend, and child of God. I find the sacred in every belief system and am inspired by the grace and love of each person I meet. Each day I am changed and am in awe of the forgiveness and love of Jesus in life. I am blessed and thankful to be part of this Spirit-filled community of St. Francis and The Canterbury.*

# Holy Saturday, March 30

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Lamentations 3:37-58, Psalm 27, Hebrews 4:1-16, Romans 8:1-11

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*“I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!’ You came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not fear!’”* Lamentations 3:57

I have long thought that the early months of the year provide two opportunities to set us up for failure. First come those New Year resolutions that, surely, we will stick to this year, only to find that they are no match for the dullness and short days of January. And next comes Lent, when, surely, this is the year we will keep our promise to give up some little luxury, or be more faithful in our daily practice, more mindful of our faith.

We began Lent on Ash Wednesday, acknowledging to ourselves and God that it is only through the love of Christ that we are saved and made whole; that without Christ we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Today we are called to imagine what our lives would be like without Christ—without grace, love and hope. What was that first Saturday without Christ like for the disciples? Jesus was gone; tortured and then murdered on the cross. There was only one disciple in attendance at his execution; the other ten were hiding, and the twelfth was dead by his own hand. The disciples had given everything to Jesus; they’d left their old lives behind to follow him. And now he was gone—dead. Just like he said would happen. How many believers howled from the depths of the pit that first day without Jesus? How many howled from the depths of their soul, believing it all for naught? And how many took the time to hear God’s reply, “Do not fear!” God is always waiting to answer our call, even—especially—when we are at our lowest.

And yet...  
and yet...

“At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Mark 15:34). There was no reply to Jesus’ plaintive call. He gave his life for us...the disciples left their old lives behind to follow Jesus, but they were able to return to them when they thought he wasn’t coming back. Jesus found them fishing in Galilee when he returned.

*Contd. on next page...*

# Holy Saturday, March 30

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Lamentations 3:37-58, Psalm 27, Hebrews 4:1-16, Romans 8:1-11

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*Contd. from previous page...*

At the moment of death, Jesus called out in desperation and pain. There was no answer to his call, not then. We live in hope 364 days a year, but today, let us imagine life without Christ - a world where death wins. It is a horrible thing to imagine, but in order to appreciate the magnitude of what Jesus did we must sometimes endure the horrible. We know how the story ends, but today, imagine if you didn't know the ending...how would you react?



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# Easter Sunday

The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 46:11

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Sunday Quotes - Psalm 46

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