

I CAN DO ALL THINGS
THROUGH CHRIST WHO
STRENGTHENS ME.

Philippians 4:13



Saint
Francis
Church

2025
Lenten Devotional

Written by the community of St. Francis Episcopal Church

←— Welcome —→

to the ninth annual Lenten Devotional Booklet

Chapter 4 of Philippians is the cornerstone of this year's theme:

"I Can Do All Things Through Christ Who Strengthens Me."

What a profound assertion to make.

Have you ever spoken -- not simply read -- those words, and allowed yourself to wholly fall into the truth of that assertion?

If not, why not?

When life as you once knew it is no longer recognizable, what do you do? Who do you call upon? Where do you go? What are you left with? How do you reignite your Joy? What keeps you from backsliding and instead propels you to move forward in a positive trajectory?

No one is without suffering. No one is without pain. Relying on Christ doesn't necessarily make it easy, but I can say with confidence He *does* make it better. He connects us to people who will walk with us. He blesses us with resilience when we're at our lowest points.

The Sunday pages of this booklet offer additional verses from Philippians 4 upon which to meditate as you consider the gravity of these words and this mindset. And between these pages are reflections written by our fellow parishioners!

Thank you to all who said "Yes" to my invitation to write a reflection for this booklet! Thank you, Laurie Anderson, for your editing expertise – it makes the process so much easier (and enjoyable) for me! Thank you, Gina McQueen, for preparing this booklet for distribution and for creatively collaborating with me on its design! And to my parish family, I hope you enjoy reading the Lenten scriptures and reflections with God by your side. May He bless each of you with what you most need for a meaningful and Holy Lent ...

In His Love,

Kristina Pela
Shepherd for Pastoral Care

←—✿— Carving Out Devotional Time —✿—→

First and foremost,
keep it simple!

Place yourself in surroundings that afford you the mental space to just “be.” You might want to consider making a ritual of lighting a candle and settling onto the couch or at a table with a journal. If the outdoors is where you feel more in tune to God, how about meditating on these readings as you take a walk or sit in your garden? If time is short, try centering yourself during your commute. Or set your alarm a little earlier and delve into the scriptures first thing in the morning, or have it be the last thing you do at night. 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 welcome time of discovery!

In God’s Love,

Kristina Pela
Shepherd for Pastoral Care

Ash Wednesday, March 5

Jonah 3:1-4:11; Hebrews 12:1-14; Luke 18:9-14; Psalm 102

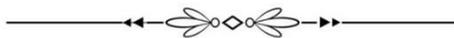
“The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people....” Luke 18:11

Considering the two praying perspectives highlighted in today’s reading reminds me of the question: "What if you woke up tomorrow with only the things you thanked God for today?" That’s not to suggest we should come up with a longer list in hopes that we’d be granted such things "tomorrow" ... to me, this question implores us to more deeply appreciate all that is good in our lives, the abundance that is so easy to take for granted we don’t even bother to count it as a blessing!

It can be so easy to see only the negative, particularly when life circumstances are especially painful. Prayers of thanksgiving aren't to deny their existence, but prayers of thanksgiving *do* help us shift our perspective. Life will still hand us the cancer diagnosis; relationships will be lost; loved ones will pass away; airplanes will crash; homes will burn to the ground. Acknowledging and allowing yourself to experience the full range of emotions associated with whatever heartache you are experiencing is important and should be honored. And in the midst of that, I encourage you to name something for which you are grateful. Hold onto that; thank God for that.

This Lent, may we proactively choose to expand our prayer perspective toward a more constant state of thanksgiving and praise. May we focus on what's good in our lives and find breadcrumbs of Peace in the midst of chaos or disappointment. This isn't a call to positive thinking. It is a call to create a deeper awareness of and gratitude for the abundance of our blessings even when our emotions may not necessarily be feeling it.

I encourage you to pause right now to consider what your circumstance would look like at this very moment if you awoke this morning with only what you thanked God for yesterday. It's a catchy question; let us spend more than just a brief moment considering it, and may we offer our prayers to Him accordingly.



Kristina Pela and her husband Fabrizio first came to St. Francis 25 years ago and raised both of their children in this church family. Kristina relishes serving St. Francis through the Taize service, the prayer teams, the SAGES, Good Grief, and lay eucharistic ministry.

Thursday, March 6

Deuteronomy 7:6-11; Titus 1:1-16; John 1:29-34; Psalm 37

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”

John 1:29-30

I was blessed to go to Israel and walk into the river Jordan and experience baptism. We went to the spot with no big building or visitor center, just a small area for sitting and reflecting. And, no kidding, doves flew by - though I heard no voice from heaven. I learned this is the moment in the Bible where God appears as Father, Son and Holy Spirit together most clearly. I liked this moment.

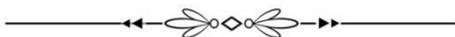
Today’s scripture reading begins with “The next day”. So, what happened the day before? The priests and Levites, at the request of the Pharisees, went to the river and asked John the Baptist who he was--the Messiah, a prophet or Elijah? John tells them that, no, he isn’t any of those. He baptizes with water, but that someone greater will come after him.

That brings us to “The next day” when John is able to testify, and this is the one I am talking about. John hadn’t recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but God made it clear with the Holy Spirit descending like a dove and God speaking that this is the Chosen One of God.

When I reflect on this passage what strikes me is how John was waiting. He was waiting with confidence. John was doing as he was told to do, baptizing with water. John did not know Jesus as the Messiah. He had to be open and listening to recognize God’s revelation that Jesus was God’s Chosen One.

Am I honestly waiting, hoping, knowing that Jesus is the one who is coming? Will I be open and listening as the Holy Spirit points out Jesus in my life today? Am I expectant of his retuning and will I recognize him as God’s chosen one?

Dear Lord, please help me to make it so. Amen.



Susie and Steve Willigrod have been attending St Francis for more than ten years. Susie came for the choir, but they have found the entire church to be a loving home and you can find them at yoga most Monday mornings!

Friday, March 7

Deuteronomy 7:12-16; Titus 2:1-15; John 1:35-42; Psalm 35

“But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance.”
Titus 2:1-2.

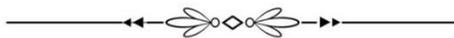
“When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” John 1:38

My younger brother taught high school for nearly thirty years before he passed away from cancer. His school hosted his Celebration of Life in its performing arts center before 600 students, colleagues, former colleagues, and former students from around the country. The love that they showed for him reminded me of the many teachers, advisors, and mentors who impacted my life and the many teachings by God in the Old and New Testament.

When I read today’s passages, I too am reminded of God as a teacher, committed to challenging and teaching us.

When I serve as a reader, I believe that it is God’s calling in my life, and that he has equipped me to try and be a reader and thus a teacher of sorts. God has given me the added responsibility of helping others understand what the Scripture is teaching and how to apply it to our lives. Once we open ourselves to receive God’s teachings, we cannot ignore what we have learned, and our lives are inevitably changed.

Especially during Lent, I try to understand what the Scripture says to me. How God is teaching and challenging me. I try to not only understand the words, but understand and convey the joy, amazement, sorrow, and sometimes fear and pain which are found in the reading.



Joe Tabrisky first heard the richness of the Old Testament in his Religious Discourse class while majoring in Rhetoric in college. Listening to Sir Lawrence Olivier read the Old Testament opened a whole new world to him of the many voices, passions, and emotions that are heard in God’s teachings to us.

Saturday, March 8

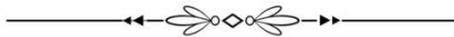
Deuteronomy 7:17-26; Titus 3:1-15; John 1:43-51; Psalm 42

“Deep calls to deep in the thunder of your waterfalls; all your waves and your billows have swept over me. By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.” Psalm 42:7-8

I love the contrast between these two verses in Psalm 42. Verse 7 makes me feel like life can sometimes be a never-ending chain of overwhelming trials and experiences. However, verse 8 then tells me that God’s presence and love are always with me, even during the difficult times. I feel like these two verses from Psalm 42 offer me a choice. I can choose to live in the raging waters, or I can choose to live with God’s song of love in my heart.

However, in practice I live in both realities. As the Psalm says, they should not be separated. In the first reality, twelve years ago I began my battles with cancer. Since then, its waves and billows have washed over me countless times as the struggle continues. But by God’s mercy I am a survivor. The second reality is that I have had the joy of seeing God’s presence in so many unforeseen ways during the past twelve years. I fondly recall being asked to ring a bell and say a prayer with all the nurses after completing two months of radiation therapy and then receiving three “Awesome” stickers in the mail from them, which I shared with others. I think of the clerk at the grocery store who asked me what I was going to do with four quarts of blueberries, and the surprised look on his face when I gave him a pint of blueberry complesse a week later. In recent years, I have taken to running or walking early in the mornings for exercise and am amazed at the number of other people out before daybreak. I joyfully welcome the opportunity to brighten their day with a little conversation or just a “good morning.”

God’s song is with me during the early morning exercise, and if I say a quick prayer inviting God into my heart, I can almost feel His hand holding mine and his heart filling mine as I run or walk those miles. It seems like the spiritual exercise is just as important as the physical exercise, and it really sets a positive outlook for the coming day with whatever “waves and billows” it may bring.



Albert Zimmerman has attended St. Francis church for 31 years and is grateful for each of those years. He has especially enjoyed the Education For Ministry (EFM) program, the spiritual study programs, 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.

Sunday
March 9



Rejoice in the Lord always.
Again I will say, rejoice!

Philippians 4:4

Monday, March 10

Deuteronomy 8:11-20; Hebrews 2:11-18; John 2:12-12; Psalm 44

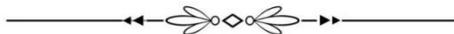
“Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.” Deuteronomy 8:2

“Keep the faith,” “Faith can move mountains,” “God never gives you more than you can handle – have faith.” I have heard many of these phrases from friends, family, TV commercials and even on social media over the years. Sometimes I feel like I am faithful but at other times I question it. When I was younger, I would pray to God for things that were important to me at the time – passing a test in school, resolving conflict with a friend or hoping we wouldn’t move when I was in high school. Sometimes I got what I prayed for and sometimes I didn’t. And when I didn’t, I questioned God’s presence in my life – how could he let that happen to me? God is supposed to love me and if he did, he would never let that happen.

Now, as an adult I still pray for things that are important to me that I need God’s help with. Sometimes it works out like I hope it will and sometimes it doesn’t. I get to experience many joyous occasions with those close to me but not everyone I care for is able to recover from illnesses or live pain free. So sometimes I still struggle with faith.

Faith is defined as “believing in a person, thing or concept even though it cannot be seen or proven.” In this scripture from Deuteronomy, the Israelites have been suffering in the desert for 40 years and experiencing severe hunger, yet they are told to have faith. They are instructed to obey his commands, walk in obedience and revere Him, even in harsh conditions. The faithful will be brought into a good land – one with much beauty and bountiful resources for a more comfortable existence.

I recall talking with our priest when we were preparing to baptize our son, Will. He shared how baptism symbolizes a person’s faith in Christ and a commitment to follow him. He said as parents, we were professing our faith and making a commitment on behalf of our child, just as our parents had done for us. It occurred to me to look at faith differently - as a gift and something I need to nurture and take care of. My faith has definitely helped me get through so many difficult times and I don’t want to lose it. Like the precious gifts of health, love and friendships, I remind myself that my faith is something to treasure and take care of and is a gift from God.



Mary Deley and her husband Tony, along with their three adult children, Adelaide, Clara and Will, have been members of St. Francis for over 20 years.

Tuesday, March 11

Deuteronomy 9:4-12; Hebrews 3:1-11; John 2:13-22; Psalm 47

"God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises..."

Psalm 47:5-6

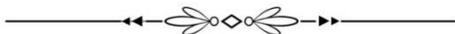
When I was 12, and my dad was 39, he "heard the call" to become an Episcopal priest. This was a big change, as he grew up as a Quaker.

I grew up with my dad working weekends, so my mom took us to church. She made sure we were baptized, learned prayers, and went to Sunday school. I even had Confirmation early with my older brother; we were leaving soon, as my dad was going to Berkeley to become a priest. The place he studied was called "the Holy Hill," as there were 3 different Theological Seminaries there.

I remember being so excited. My dad was changing jobs from "selling insurance to selling Bibles." That is what everyone said. I did see him being ordained with others, and I actually saw the halo light up on everyone's heads! I had never seen anything like it. It was God's grace.

What loving joy I saw. We all began a new journey, moving around to new churches every 2 years. My faith began to grow. I decided to check out my friend's synagogue. Since I could not become a priest, maybe I could become a Jew, and be more like Jesus. At that time, women were not allowed to be ordained. So, as I grew older, I taught Sunday School, sang in Choir, and became a Lector. Now, women can become deacons, priests, even bishops!

So, I sing praises to God!



Susie Zimmerman has attended St. Francis church for 31 years. She served on the Vestry, taught Education for Ministry for 7 years, has sung in the Choir for 25 years, is learning Altar Guild, is part of St. Anne's Guild, and helped lead the Christian Family Movement (CFM) into the 21st century by serving on the Board of Directors for North America. She also served on the Weekend Retreat for Cornerstone in 2023 and 2024 and continues to help in Cornerstone.

Wednesday, March 12

Deuteronomy 9:13-21; Hebrews 3:12-19; John 2:23-3:15; Psalm 49

“For he sees that even the wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others.” Psalm 49:10

“Be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For when he dies, he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him.” Psalm 49:16-17

Psalm 49, to me, is a wisdom psalm highlighting the fleeting nature of wealth and the certainty of death. I am reminded to refrain from placing trust in riches and, instead, to embrace the fact that no amount of money can ransom a soul from death. I cannot escape the power of the grave; hence, I will die someday and see the pit. I reflect on my need to be secure with a roof over my head, and to think about a roof over my soul, which comes from God, who alone has the power to redeem me with greener pastures in this life and the life hereafter.

I have shared my riches with others and have come to see that possessing riches makes me vulnerable to cheaters. My belief that my riches are my security gives a reason for cheaters to surround me in wait for my spoils. But then I think, are they *my* spoils? I cannot take them with me and only those behind me can enjoy them until it is their turn to see the pit.

I am losing my trust in wealth. The comforts of today are not guaranteed to me tomorrow. This Lent, I want to trust in God more than my wealth. I want to fully accept that placing my trust in God brings me real security and allows the fleeting certainty of wealth to go with the wind and the day-to-day trials and tribulations.

I must learn to believe that wealth and status are temporary, while only God can provide lasting security and redemption. Are my lifelines opening now to see that God is my security that matters and that my security becomes unlimited based on my dependence on God rather than on material wealth? This Lent, I want to live with eternity in mind rather than material things, making choices that honor God, and valuing what truly matters over temporary gains. This is a very tall order for me, and perhaps anyone.

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Wednesday, March 12

Deuteronomy 9:13-21; Hebrews 3:12-19; John 2:23-3:15; Psalm 49

I will pray for these beliefs this Lent and onward:

- Trust in God, not wealth.
- Pray for God's guidance in financial decisions.
- Help others rather than hoarding my riches.
- Acknowledge my dependence on God.
- Love and serve others by being kind and compassionate, before I speak or write.
- Forgive quickly.
- Practice more self-control to limit distractions from my eternal perspective.



Darryl Tillman remembers his first service at St. Francis with Mary/Liz and John Bacon after not having attended Catholic services for almost 15 years. The Episcopal Church and the Bacon family were new to him, and he experienced only open, welcoming arms from both. He has been with St. Francis over 31 years and is engaged in many of its ministries.

Thursday, March 13

Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5; Hebrews 4:1-10; John 3:16-21; Psalm 59

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

A picture is vivid in my mind of an elderly couple who lived next door to us when I was a young mother. They were commenting on the lovely service they had just attended, a memorial of a friend of theirs. At that time in my life I had never attended a memorial service. I was shocked at their calm discussion of a service after the death of a friend or family member.

Now, the veteran of many memorials, funerals, and celebrations of life for too many dear family members and friends, I can relate to their comments. Heartbreaking as the loss of a loved one is, the service can be comforting. Remembrances of loved ones bring to mind one's own thoughts about a person who is no longer here. Such was my experience recently at the memorial of a friend. Reading the verses from John which remind us of God's love for the world in the gift to us of Jesus, the true manifestation of love, refreshed my memory of a recent memorial service.

I have no doubt that each of us attending had experienced the love of the person whose life we were there to celebrate. I had seen her loving ways expressed in her interactions with the children she taught, in her warm smiles and greetings to everyone she encountered. I saw her way of life as a sermon on love. At the end of the service we were invited to recite the 23rd Psalm with Mary Baker Eddy's interpretation. I found it very meaningful.

[Divine love] is my shepherd; I shall not want.

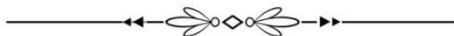
[Love] maketh me to lie down in green pastures: [love] leadeth me beside the still waters.

[Love] restoreth my soul [spiritual sense]: [love leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for [love] is with me, [love's] rod and [love's] staff they comfort me.

[Love] prepareth a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: [love] anointeth my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house [the consciousness] of [love] forever.



Patt Parker has enjoyed being a member of St. Francis parish for many years. She is blessed with two daughters, two sons-in-law and five grandchildren.

Friday, March 14

Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Hebrews 4:11-16; John 3:22-36; Psalm 51

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?”

Deuteronomy 10:12-23

“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; A broken and contrite heart You, God, will not despise.” – Psalm 51:17

The most common phrase in the Bible is, “Do not be afraid,” and yet the Book of Deuteronomy counsels us in the opposite. “Be afraid!” it tells us. Be afraid, for this is “the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.”

What a paradox to live within! How are we supposed to be afraid and not be afraid?

But this is the God who told Abraham to sacrifice his son; the God who told Moses to go to Egypt and tell the most powerful man in the Near East to release all his slaves. To believe these stories is to believe in a terrifying God; a God who is capable of interrupting YOU in the most mundane moment of YOUR life; of plucking YOU straight out of your daily commute and sending YOU into unimaginable hardship.

We don’t think of “bad” things as interventions by God; we don’t recognize trauma and catastrophe as God sending us on a mission. We pray for relief. We pray for the journey we’re being sent on to end, quickly! Yes, we all inherently fear God; for we all fear the idea that one bad thing can destroy our entire lives. All of the material wealth, safety and security we have accumulated can really be lost in a fire; in a flood; in a landslide. Everything can be taken from us.

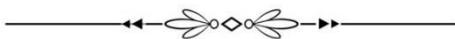
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Friday, March 14

Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Hebrews 4:11-16; John 3:22-36; Psalm 51

Life will break us. God will break us. Of course that should frighten us. But it is the act of being broken, of being interrupted, that teaches us to be courageous; to *not* be afraid of God's call. And we can rail against it, or we can choose to go within, seek out that small quiet voice in the chaos, and find the courage to answer: "Here I am, Lord. You have interrupted me. What can I do for You?"

That question, though simple, is the beginning of our story with God. And when we can ask that in the midst of our tragedies, it is that question that lets God break us down and rebuild us, and embark on a new journey with Him.



Shelley Reece moved to the South Bay in 2017 after a period of discernment with the Carmelites, where she felt God telling her to leave the monastery and tend to His children. A lifelong martial artist, that call was unexpectedly fulfilled during the pandemic when she found herself working at Ancient Ways Karate, helping to bring the values and integrity of the martial arts to more than 150 of God's children! When she's not teaching or competing, Shelley enjoys singing in the choir on Sundays and writing fantasy novels set in her homeland, Wales.

Saturday, March 15

Deuteronomy 11:18-28; Hebrews 5:1-10; John 4:1-26; Psalm 138

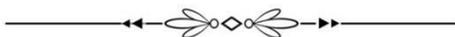
“The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’ (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans). Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.’” John 4:9-10

This is the gospel where Jesus says to a Samaritan woman at a well “Give Me a drink.” She didn’t know who He was and quizzes Him why He would ask her. He then tells her He would have given her “living water.” After more conversation, He reveals to her who He is.

I began to wonder why Jesus would talk to her. She was a Samaritan and Jewish people typically despised them. Not only was she a Samaritan, but she was a woman, and she also had a questionable reputation. Why would He ask her for a drink? Why would Jesus have given her the gift of spiritual “living water”? Why would He reveal Himself to her?

These questions circulated in my head. Then I asked myself what would I have done if I was the woman. Would I have admonished Him? Would He have revealed Himself to me? Then I realized that He has. So many times in my life such as when I was young and under the tutelage of my parents and grade school; when I was a teenager and attended a high school retreat and felt His presence truly enter my heart; when I turned away from Him for a while after a divorce; when I acknowledge how blessed I am with my husband, family, friends and the beauty of our world. I then thank Him for all I am, all I have and trust in Him for what is yet to come.

This year during Lent I intend to pay closer attention and recognize each and every time He reveals Himself to me and to share His revelations with others. I am hopeful and will pray this will become a practice that will carry on beyond Lent.



Mary Ann Cronin has been a member of St. Francis since 1997 when she and her husband moved to PVE. They enjoy their families and friends along with traveling and hiking. Mary Ann enjoys being part of the St. Francis family, the Vestry, Altar Guild and helping at our services and events in any way she can.

Sunday March 16



Let your gentleness be known to
all men. The Lord is at hand.

Philippians 4:5

Monday, March 17

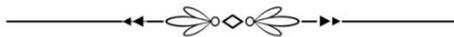
Jeremiah 1:11-19; Romans 1:1-15; John 4:27-42; Psalm 64

“Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from the dread enemy.”
Psalm 64:1

In Psalm 64, David is distraught and earnestly appeals to God for protection against lies promulgated by his enemies. The situation is particularly distressing because his enemies are devious and executing their plans in secret, which makes them difficult to identify. They are able to wield their “bitter words like arrows” with impunity, and David is unable to mount an effective defense. Despite his anguish, David professes his unwavering faith, confident that God will eventually strike back at the enemies, bring them to ruin, and lay their deceit and intentions bare for all to see.

Although this Psalm pertains specifically to David’s circumstances, it serves as a broader encouragement for anyone facing unjustified attacks and malicious slander to maintain a strong faith in God. The primary reason for this call appears to be the assurance that God, as a just God who values truth, will in due course reveal the truth to counter the lies. But there is a second layer to the Psalm: what David is more specifically asking for is not so much for God to strike back at the enemies, but for God to protect him from his fear of his enemies. That is, David has no doubt that truth will eventually prevail, but in the meantime, he is imploring God to help him remain undistracted by fear of his enemies, so that he can continue to live righteously.

How many times have we been consumed by concerns regarding other people’s words? It reminds me of instances when our kids would confide in us that some school peers had been saying mean things about them and they would ask, “Why are they saying that about me? What did I do to deserve that?” Many of our responses revolved around reminding them that they could not control other people’s words and even thoughts, but they could control their own words and behaviors. They could choose to act righteously and have faith that although in the short run the lies may be detrimental, over time people would judge them by their actions and come to see the truth about their character. Truth has a divine quality. As Jesus said, “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” (John 18:37)



Fabrizio Pela 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.

Tuesday, March 18

Jeremiah 2:1-13; Romans 1:16-25; John 4:43-54; Psalm 68

“Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, extol him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before him—his name is the Lord.” Psalm 68:4

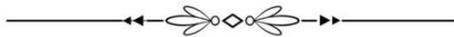
The Israelites have won a major battle, and they are celebrating their conquest. However, David is clear that the praise belongs to God. He implores the righteous to be glad, to let the righteous rejoice before God, *yea let them exceedingly rejoice*. They should sing unto God, sing praises unto His name, extol Him who rideth upon the heavens (i.e., God) and rejoice before Him. That looks like five times in verses 1 - 5 that David exhorts the people to praise God!

God resides as a father to the fatherless, those who are bound with chains, and women who have fought but have returned as widows (who divided the spoils of battle.) David tells God that they dwell within them, and that your congregation is prepared for your goodness for the poor. God then gives the word. Great was the company of those who proclaimed it.

And the celebration continues, even within the sanctuary! First to enter were the singers, followed by players on instruments, then the damsels playing with timbrels or tambourines. David predicts that because of the temple at Jerusalem kings shall bring presents unto God. Princes shall come out of Egypt. Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. Sing unto God, ye kingdoms. Sing praises unto the Lord.

What this passage means to me:

What a scene this must have created! People running all over the place! Groups singing, dancing, shouting, playing. All of it! And then king David appears making sure that God is given the thanks by the righteous celebrants. And the temple appears to be not merely an artifact to be used for religious activities but is completely involved in day-to-day life. Much like my own life, except when it's not.



Joseph Young participates in church activities involving distribution of food at St Luke's Episcopal church in Long Beach. He and his longtime friend Gayle Taylor love live theater and other cultural activities. They have gone on numerous treks together on Earthwatch events. Both enjoy reading about archaeology, ancient artifacts, science, and more.

Wednesday, March 19

Jeremiah 3:6-18; Romans 1:28-2:11; John 5:1-18; Psalm 119

ABCDEFGH...IJKLMNOP...QRS...TUV...WX...Y and Z...a catchy little tune known as one learns to read and write English in the United States. I still hum along when I alphabetize! It has also been a gift when I struggle to sleep or when I'm worried or afraid. Starting with the letter "A" I recite words of truth and beauty beginning with each letter – for these are the attributes of God.

The unknown author(s) of Psalm 119 had the same idea. Each stanza of this Psalm begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet—all 22 letters—from Alef to Tav. Not only this, but each line within the stanza also begins with that same letter. Repetition being key to aid in the memorization of its wisdom.

I can't help but wonder if the man from our Scripture reading in John 5 had memorized Psalm 119 to help keep his heart and mind from despair as he waited near the pool called Bethesda. Scripture tells us that he had been disabled for 38 years and had been near the pool for a long time. I wonder if the man said the words of the memorized Psalm thinking it happens for others and not expecting it would happen for him.

I can imagine this man lying on his mat beginning his prayer through Scripture with the first letter of his alphabet, Alef, and reciting each stanza as he waits for the pool called Bethesda to be stirred. It was believed that the first person to make it to the pool after it was stirred would be healed. Ps. 119:25 (Dalet – the fourth letter in the Hebrew alphabet.) "I lie prostrate in the dust; revive me in keeping with your word...v.28 I am melting away from anxiety and grief; renew my strength in keeping with your word." Perhaps this is when Jesus greets him, "Do you want to get well?" I'm so curious about Jesus' question. The goal for the man was the pool, so I want to believe that, yes, of course, he wants to get well! Isn't this obvious?

I wonder if anyone else besides me prays, desires, and longs for healing without actually thinking of life beyond my current circumstance – be it disability, ailment, personal or communal crisis. Do we want to get well? I have often longed and pleaded as the Psalmist...but then what? Most times I forget to live expecting my circumstance to change. I anticipate that it won't, so I continue to pray with longing – which often leads to discouragement rather than hope. I wonder if this happened to the man too, and this is why Jesus asked, "Do you want to get well?" Perhaps he was asking if the man held onto the hope of getting well and if the man could picture living any other way than by the pool.

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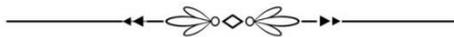
Wednesday, March 19

Jeremiah 3:6-18; Romans 1:28-2:11; John 5:1-18; Psalm 119

Jesus commands to “get up – pick up your mat and walk.” Instantly the man did as Jesus told. I wonder if he felt the sudden resurgence of strength and feeling instead of possible numbness? I wonder if his legs worked perfectly or if he needed to steady himself on Jesus to learn how to walk again? I wonder what it will be like for me.

Later Jesus finds the man, “Go and sin no more so that something worse doesn’t happen to you.” I don’t know the sin...but I do wonder if perhaps it was passively praying for God to intervene without actively living a life expecting healing and wholeness. It’s possible, and I have some work to do in my own life.

“Now I know my ABC’s...won’t you come along and expect God to show up with me?”



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 cuddling with their dog, Jasa.

Thursday, March 20

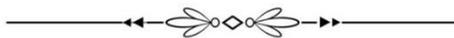
Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28; Romans 2:12-24; John 5:19-29; Psalm 74

One of the most important things I had to learn about reading the Bible is just what an extraordinary book it is and how reading it can compromise us without our knowing it. Clearly, the Bible can be the richest thing to read as a source of light and life and peace and faith and hope. What I needed to sort out was that, whatever else is in this ancient book, there are rules and there are promises. Is this book littered with contradictions or not? Making a long story short, the promises are the main throughline, and any of the rules must be understood as not contradicting a promise such as “we are not under law, but under grace.” (Rom 6:14)

So when I reflect on this passage, there is some technical language about *hearers* and *doers of the Law*, about the *Gentiles*, *circumcision*, and about sinning *without* and *under the law*. But the first part that popped out at me was: “When the Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature, do what the law requires...they show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them...”

I have been marinating in CS Lewis for the past several months, so this passage naturally struck a nerve. In both *Mere Christianity* and *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis says that in all times and every civilization, humans have had an innate ethical code of right and wrong behavior, as well as an acute sense that they cannot or do not follow their own code. So, I took Paul’s reference to the Gentiles having God’s law “written on their hearts” as the same thing the Apostle is telling the Christians in ancient Rome.

This reality is what we casually refer to as us humans having a conscience, which is true enough. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit, since we know that God’s “kindness leads [us] to repentance.” (Rom 2:4) I am unspeakably thankful that God, through the Spirit and my conscience, keeps me tethered to Him. Perhaps this is the “circumcision of the heart” that Paul mentions at the end of this passage. I take this as God’s real-time reminder that He loves even me.



Dale Westervelt is a husband and father and has a Masters of Arts degree in Theology and in Church History. A former vestry member and currently teaching a class at St. Francis called CS Lewis on Joy and Suffering and In Between. To say that he loves St. Francis would be a lesson in understatement.

Friday, March 21

Jeremiah 5:1-9; Romans 2:25-3:18; John 5:30-47; Psalm 95

*“Although they say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives,’ still they are swearing falsely.”
“Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are not gods.”* Jeremiah 5:2,7

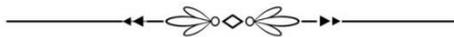
Jeremiah’s people had become corrupt, destructive, and violent. Jeremiah was in despair, feeling the future was hopeless. God asks of them “Why should I forgive you?” God fulfilled their needs, but they turned away to worship false gods. During the Babylonian exile, God, with unconditional love, waited for the people to realize their sins, repent, and turn to Him. Jeremiah, finding hope and trust in God’s love, encouraged people to believe that and repent, then God would restore blessings and forgive.

At times, I understand Jeremiah’s despair. The false gods of selfishness, cruelty, and violence surround us. Affected by negativity, I find myself wondering if I deserve to be forgiven for the things I have done and left undone. I wonder about the future of my world.

Yet, I choose to reject despair and keep hope in God’s love. I seek and witness positive action. Where there is injury and harm, love and support heal wounds. I see people giving voice to the ones who are suffering. This inspires me to believe that I can send hope, love, and compassion to others, and all of us together can change the world.

A Canterbury resident once asked me if I have hope; I said, “yes.” The resident said he did not, so I told him I would hold hope for him, and he thanked me. He told me the other day that he is now content, and sees his life as good, and that the future will work out. He has found that hope in life has returned to him.

With God’s unconditional love and forgiveness, this Lent, I will give up the negative obstacles that hold me back from right actions and hope for goodness in life. I find hope in the support from everyone at St. Francis. I can and will give what I can to help others. This gives me hope for my future and that people are basically good at heart. I carry hope in God’s love and blessings, I will endure whatever challenges occur in my life, with God’s help and community support. My plan is to hope for a better life by believing in love, taking action, making mistakes, learning, asking for forgiveness and guidance. Repeat as needed.



Reverend Celeste Stump is a deacon at St. Francis, chaplain at The Canterbury, mother, grandmother, friend, and child of God. She finds the sacred in every belief system and is inspired by the grace and love of each person she meets. Each day she is changed and in awe of the forgiveness and love of Jesus in her life.

Saturday, March 22

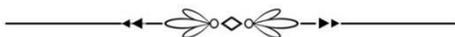
Jeremiah 5:20-31; Romans 3:19-31; John 7:1-13; Psalm 23

“He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me.” Psalm 24: 3-4

In the 23rd Psalm, David writes about the presence of the Lord and what He does for him. David had many troubles in his life, but Psalm 23 shows the faith he had in the Lord and how he depended on Him as protector and provider in his life. No matter how dark the valley was that he was going through, David knew that the Lord would lead him in the paths of righteousness and would protect him from his enemies.

When I was much younger (before my 40’s), I was afraid all the time. I was afraid of failing at work, even though I always got good reviews. I was afraid of not being able to take care of my elderly mother properly. I was very shy and was afraid to talk to people. My mother diagnosed my problem as having fear because I didn’t have enough faith. She gave me some tapes (this was a long time ago!) by Kenneth Copland on “Faith, not Fear.” I listened to these tapes over and over, and they helped me start to develop faith, to trust in God, and to put my fears to rest.

I had to learn Psalm 23 by heart as a child in Sunday school. At the time, of course, I didn’t really understand what the 23rd Psalm was about. But now I make use of it in my day-to-day life. Whenever I am in a stressful situation, I recite it to myself to remind myself of God’s goodness and constant presence. When I was at work, I would recite it to myself before giving a briefing to high-ranking managers or customers to remind myself of God’s protection. When I have an MRI, I recite it to myself while in the machine to allay my fear since I am somewhat claustrophobic. And if I have trouble sleeping at night, I recite it to myself—it comforts me to know that God will always lead me in the right paths and will restore my soul. And deep in my heart I know that God’s goodness and mercy will surely follow me throughout my life.



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.

Sunday March 23



Be anxious for nothing,
but in everything by prayer and supplication,
with thanksgiving, let your requests be
made known to God; and the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds
through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Monday, March 24

Jeremiah 7:1-15; Romans 4:1-12; John 7:14-36; Psalm 77

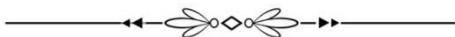
“If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly ... then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever.” Jeremiah 7:5, 7

“Jesus answered, ‘My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.’” John 7:16-18

On top of the usual life challenges that we all face, recent fires, landslides, homelessness, layoffs, and even deaths have been the local news. In addition, cultural clashes in America and war and other humanitarian crises across the globe have been occurring. What are we to do? How do we manage through the noise and complexity, the strife and anxiety?

As has been the case for millennia, the Bible serves as a welcome source of wise and inspiring guidance. Today’s scripture readings very clearly counsel us to listen to God’s words. In the first passage, the Lord tells Jeremiah to go to the Temple and proclaim to those that are there to listen to the Lord and act justly towards others, as exemplified by not oppressing the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, not shedding innocent blood there, and not following other gods. Further, he declares that they are not to steal, murder, commit adultery or perjury. Only by behaving according to the word of the Lord might they be permitted to live on that land and be safe in God’s house. In the second passage from John’s Gospel, Jesus is very clear that what he is teaching comes from God, and not himself. He goes on to state that a person that speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, while a person of truth seeks the glory of God.

Even though they were written two thousand years ago, these scripture readings appear to me to speak directly to our current events and provide direction as to how to act and what to believe. Despite all of the turmoil and troubles that we observe and experience in our world today, these Bible passages seem especially relevant, even down to specific language. Yet again, the Bible advises us to do our best to follow God’s word.



Hal Yee and his family have attended St. Francis, since 2012. He currently serves on the Vestry and helps with coffee hour.

Tuesday, March 25

Jeremiah 7:21-34; Romans 4:13-25; John 7:37-52; Psalm 78

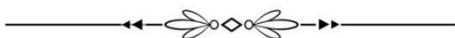
“For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham...” Romans 4:16

Where does my Faith come from? It is a gift of grace, an unearned gift from God, as is the relief that it brings from the fears that I might face my daily life. Somehow through this mystery I begin to understand that Faith is not mine to lose, though it may appear hidden from me if I don't connect with God on a daily basis. I must try to remember: “When fear knocks, let Faith answer the door.”

Joy, too -- that feeling of fullness of heart and the peace that accompanies it -- comes from Faith. If I am of service to others I can be relieved from my own worries on my mind. By reaching out with a positive attitude, I can find a path to joy, again a gift of grace.

A prayer for today:

God, may I follow Your Will today, and stay out of my own way by wanting things to be my way and of my will. May I be reminded of the verses in the prayer of St. Francis as I interact with others: “For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned.”



John Bukowski grew up attending Catholic schools through college, and years later converted to the Episcopal Church. The Bukowski family moved to the Holiday Lights neighborhood of Torrance in 2005, and they have been members of St. Francis Parish for nearly 20 years. John often attends the 8 a.m. Sunday Services.

Wednesday, March 26

Jeremiah 8:18-9:6; Romans 5:1-11; John 8:12-20; Psalm 81

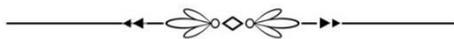
“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

In Romans, Paul tells us that God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This love is not something we earn; it is unconditional. Through Jesus, we are reminded that we are saved by God’s grace, through our faith, not by the things we do.

It’s easy to get caught up in the need to know every step of the journey ahead. I find myself obsessing over what’s next for me often and must remind myself that true faith calls us to let go of control and trust God’s plan. In our family, we have a saying: “give it to God.” It’s a simple but powerful reminder that God’s yoke is easy. (Matthew 11.) Getting caught up in resistance such as frustration or anxiety is more difficult than simply surrendering – choosing to give your worries to the Lord, acknowledging we cannot solve everything on our own. God is faithful and His timing is perfect. We can rest in the knowledge that God is in control and his plans are to help us to prosper. His plans are for good.

We need to practice allowing God to lead, for it does not come naturally. We need to practice choosing to trust in peace, to be still, rather than to resist or react negatively when we encounter a bump in the road. As believers, we are called to reject the pessimism the world feeds us. Our duty as Christians is simple: spread God’s love.

As you go through the day, remember that there is no barrier or requirement to receiving His love. Don’t let the world turn you sour, for you are a child of God! Allow His light to shine through you onto others. Have patience. Give a compliment. Smile. Inspire love in those around you.



Brittany Montiel is a child of God. She is passionate about her career as a litigation paralegal. Brittany is blessed with a loving family, partner AJ, her cute Boxer dog Jax, and the community and love here at Saint Francis.

Thursday, March 27

Jeremiah 10:11-24; Romans 5:12-21; John 8:21-32; Psalm 86

“Be merciful unto me, O Lord, for I cry unto thee daily.” Psalm 86:3

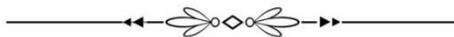
As I read and reread and considered today’s Psalm in preparation for creating an appropriate reflection, I realized that my first impression was that I didn’t like this Psalm. I looked at other options, but I kept coming back to this one. Then it hit me: I could have written this one myself. The first verse is “Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me: for I am poor and needy.” Let the whining commence.

When I left to go east, I missed my St. Francis parish family and my own family, especially my grandchildren. Little did I know what lay ahead – COVID. I spent three years imprisoned in my North Carolina apartment, terrified to go out when so many folks refused to wear masks, refused vaccinations, and felt no shame in coughing in one’s face. I just knew the whole situation was affecting me worse than others.

I tried to find a church and settled on one that reminded me of St. Francis: welcoming, excellent music and preaching. I felt comfortable there until I heard the news that the Rector was moving—to California, somewhere in the Pasadena area. What? This was totally unfair, I whined, as I congratulated him as if I really meant it. Verse 3 is “Be merciful unto me, O Lord, for I cry unto thee daily.” I sank deeper into self-pity. I prayed that God was working His way and I knew I should be grateful and simply wait for His better plan. Turns out I’m not so good at waiting. I stopped trying to find a church and relied totally on the live broadcasts from St. Francis.

Friends found an apartment in Florida—17th floor, heated pool, and views of the Gulf of Mexico—aha! Blessing from God! Stop whining, I thought. Then two hurricanes hit us directly last September. We had two hours’ notice of evacuation but only anticipated the first one and thought we’d be back in a day or two. So I packed my bathing suits and coverups and flip flops. We haven’t been allowed back in our apartments yet.

But I am home, where I belong, because of His grace and mercy.



Jayne Bray has been a parishioner of St. Francis for many years and is grateful for the blessings of her church family.

Friday, March 28

Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-20; Romans 6:1-11; John 8:33-47; Psalm 91

“Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word.” John 8:37

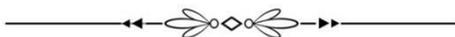
This line spoke most to me from the readings for this day. In this passage, Jesus is speaking to those who seek to kill him because they are threatened by His ideas of radical love and inclusion. They insist that they are already saved just by being descendants of Abraham, and the sense here is that they feel entitled, they feel that their understanding is correct, with no room for listening, self-reflection nor learning.

Sounds a little like the world we live in right now.

It is so easy today to surround ourselves by viewpoints we agree with. We can select a news source that echoes or reinforces beliefs we already hold, without asking us to really think about what those beliefs mean for others who may be different from us. We feel a sense of righteousness in holding tight to those viewpoints, as though we have earned them through thoughtful consideration. But how often DO we give thoughtful consideration to our worldly views? Have we arrived at our opinions based in a love such as Christ taught us? Or have we been brainwashed by repetition in an echo chamber of our own choosing?

Have we made ROOM to hear the word of Jesus? Do we hear and take deeply to heart his message of love for our neighbor – ALL of our neighbors, not just those we look like, live like, agree with – and his message of trust in God.

In this Lenten season, I intend to pause when I feel a wave of righteous indignation coming on. Pause and listen. Pause and make ROOM for the word of Jesus. So that I can root my world view, my actions, my heart in a place of love for others and trust in God.



Jill Lynch has been a member of St. Francis for more than 20 years and a member of the Choir for almost that entire time. Jill teaches yoga part-time. She and her partner Kelly are the proud parents of three children - Shannon, Reese, and Jordan.

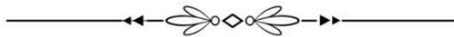
Saturday, March 29

Jeremiah 13:1-11; Romans 6:12-23; John 8:47-59; Psalm 136

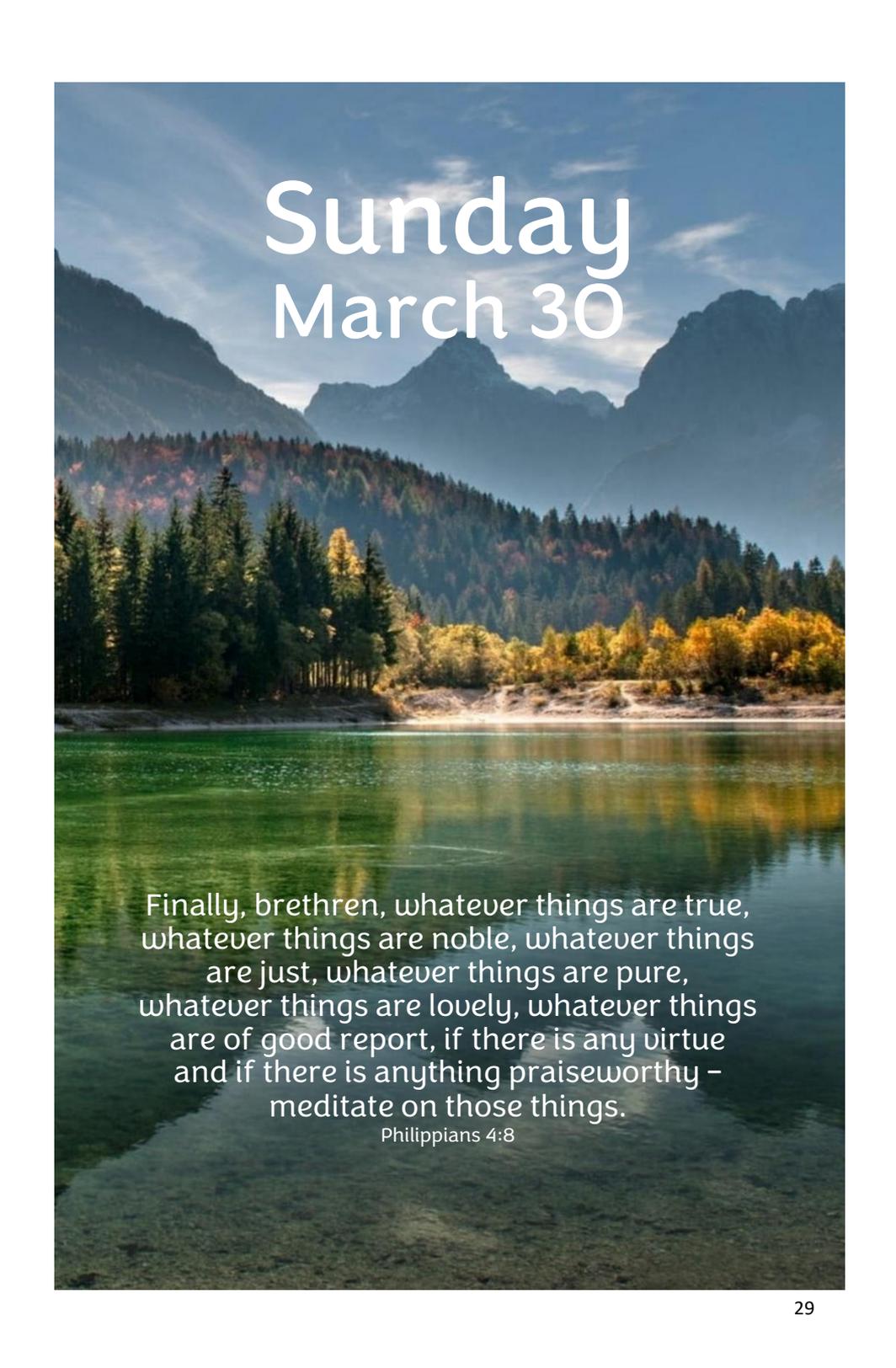
Like most of the ten million people who call Los Angeles County home, the recent fires in Pacific Palisades and Altadena scared me and required me to ask “Why, God, can’t you make our beautiful Southern California safe for all of us? How could this happen to the land we love?” Even those of us whose homes were not burned and whose families were not put at risk are saddened, horrified, and scared by the magnitude of the disaster. Was it climate change? Bad management by utility companies? Or simply bad luck because our ecosystems are not really set up for millions of people hugging the foothills of a range where fire is a natural part of the environment?

Jeremiah, the prophet of doom, is relevant to these questions. I’ve never regarded Jeremiah as someone I could read in times of trial because most of his “jeremiads” (long, mournful complaints) are pretty alien to modern minds. Jeremiah 13: 1-11 recounts an interesting story: Jeremiah is instructed by God to buy a linen belt (a symbol of God’s covenant with humans), wear it, and then place it in a watery crevice, where, of course, it is ruined. The symbolism is clear: our covenant with God is ruined if we don’t keep his commandments. Jeremiah says instead of sin, “Offer every part of yourself as an instrument of righteousness.”

What does this mean for us? For me, the fires were a kind of reckoning. I needed to review why I live in California and why I live as I do, without as much regard for people or places as I ought to have. God calls me to humility and thoughtfulness, and, as much as I hate to admit it, perhaps the fires serve personally to guide me to doing what I can to love and serve others, protect the environment in any way I can, and most importantly, to remember that to be saved, I must become a “slave to righteousness,” as Paul says in Romans. The scriptures for today are all about “not getting ahead of ourselves,” or “not assuming that we are in control.” What we control is our relationship with God. That is what matters.



A retired English teacher, Gayle Taylor has been an active member of St. Francis for more years than she can count. A graduate of the Education for Ministry Program (EfM), she enjoys reading, traveling, oil painting, cooking, and playing with her grandchildren. She looks forward to serving on the Vestry for the next three years.



Sunday March 30

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true,
whatever things are noble, whatever things
are just, whatever things are pure,
whatever things are lovely, whatever things
are of good report, if there is any virtue
and if there is anything praiseworthy –
meditate on those things.

Philippians 4:8

Monday, March 31

Jeremiah 16:10-21; Romans 7:1-12; John 6:1-15; Psalm 89

“What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “you shall not covet. But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.” Romans 7:7-8

My husband and I were grocery shopping in Utah this winter, and a sign in the eggs section declared “Only 4 dozen eggs per customer”. My husband said, “I didn’t know I wanted 5 dozen eggs until they told me I could only have 4 dozen.” The idea, presented in the scripture, that covetousness, or want, was created by the commandment caused me to stop and ponder why this commandment was included in the “laws” handed down to Moses. Isn’t want the most basic component of progress throughout history? We were hungry and wanted food, so we learned to hunt and harvest. We wanted protection from the elements, so we built shelter. We wanted bright and shiny objects so we worked for goods to trade for them. We wanted more, so we built empires to acquire more. Why does God require, through his laws, that we stop wanting?

My first introduction to the Ten Commandments, outside of Sunday school, was the movie. Charlton Heston, descending from the mountain with the stone tablets. Cinematic drama ensued: red sky, fire, yelling, screaming, “those who shall not live by the law shall die by the law!” Scary stuff! The message is that the laws are to be obeyed, if you break the laws it is sin, and sinners will be punished. But, thinking about the commandment to not covet has me rethinking this scenario.

What if the Commandments were meant to guide us to happiness, maybe even joy? Coveting has never brought me joy. Especially in today’s world of Instagram, TikTok and Facebook. I see pictures of perfect lives and beautiful faces, holidays without drama, perfect vacations, idyllic bathrooms. Why don’t I have holidays without drama? My holidays are full of drama because of the people I love most in life, my family! So why would I “want” a life without them? I wouldn’t!

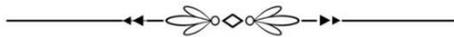
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Monday, March 31

Jeremiah 16:10-21; Romans 7:1-12; John 6:1-15; Psalm 89

Can I train myself to not covet, and to be happy with all that God has given me? Do I need anything more? Wanting more is perhaps the most prevalent human activity. But wanting, nor achieving more has ever truly brought me joy.

The first 9 Commandments, when followed, will certainly lead to a better life. But with the 10th Commandment, I believe that God is commanding us not only to stop wanting, but to “be happy”. Praise be to God!



Shelly Zak and her husband Bill have been attending St. Francis for nearly 20 years. Shelly just finished a 2-year stint as Sr Warden and is looking forward to the next chapter of service to her beloved St Francis family. Shelly really is so grateful for her family including her daughters, Elisabeth (28), Kimberley (27 - today March 31st, Happy Birthday Kimberley), and Christine (24).

Tuesday, April 1

Jeremiah 17:19-27; Romans 7:13-25; John 6:16-27; Psalm 97

“Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people...” Jeremiah 17:19

Life brings a continuum of moments where we contemplate the past and look toward the future. I reflect on these as instantaneous moments. Gates in time. Our lives. Spiritually, they embrace people, events, locations, emotions. I recently experienced a momentous event, supported by our community, revealing, through this gate, a glorious future. My open-heart surgery was a surprise. The support of God, the Trinity, a divine surgical and medical team, and my family and friends, have allowed me to remain on this earth, in the flesh, to do good.

“...and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south...”
Jeremiah 17:26

My journey continues. Within each instantaneous gate, I, as a child of people, continue to be present in life. As I travel on I hope to find joy in the past and look forward to joy in the future. On my journey I will also uncover burdens from the past and prepare for those of the future, with peace. My wife and I hail from the South, the Midwest, the Pacific, the Atlantic. We both lost our fathers way too soon. They were wonderful. Our mothers are both octogenarians with health challenges, yet they remain joyful to share each moment of our lives. Our children, raised here in the West, have re-entered gates back to the Midwest, South and Northwest, pursuing professional careers, gaining experience, and living life. It is through the peace of God that we leave the burdens behind and embrace our spiritual presence and experience the wonder of their accomplishments.

“...and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going...”
John 6:21

Although tremendous effort is often experienced, the spontaneity of God’s instantaneous gates places us where we need to be when we open ourselves to the moment. I look back only to be amazed, blessed and honored with where we are. Standing in the gate. Standing on the shore. Where we were going. Where they are going. Present with peace.

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Tuesday, April 1

Jeremiah 17:19-27; Romans 7:13-25; John 6:16-27; Psalm 97

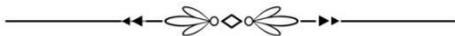
“...Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life...” John 6:27

The effort and labor it takes to step through each gate is a wonder. Gaining our education. Producing our family. Undertaking our careers. Stepping through a morning walk. Cooking a community meal. Gardening. Maintaining. Resourcing. Rising in the morning. Saying hello. Those moments accumulate as receipt of our everlasting joy. Now.

“...For what I will to do, that I do not practice... If, then, I do what I will not to do...” Romans 7:15-16

There are other moments. I praise and seek God's peace when my will is not strong enough to accept responsibility, with a notion and intent to move on. It is with grace that I feel we are allowed to ask for forgiveness, to look through that next gate as we stand, and once again endeavor to do good. God is a powerful gate.

“...The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples see His glory...” Psalm 97:5-6



Anthony “Tony” Deley was born to his father, a first generation Greek Orthodox American father and mother, an Irish Scottish Protestant American. He is a cradle Episcopalian, raised at St. John’s in Centralia, Illinois. He and his wife Mary have 3 children: Adelaide, an Architect in Chicago, Clara, a Registered Dietitian in San Francisco, and Will a computer science, math major at Wisconsin. A career space professional, Tony enjoys the outdoors, landscaping, basketball, beach volleyball, roller blading, refereeing soccer, power yoga, grilling and cooking mass meals.

Wednesday, April 2

Jeremiah 18:1-11; Romans 8:1-11; John 6:27-40; Psalm 101

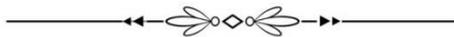
“Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’”

John 6: 28-29

The above exchange emphasizes the importance of faith in Jesus as the cornerstone for our spiritual lives. The application of this verse can profoundly impact our daily lives, guiding us in faith, action, and community.

The teachings of Jesus are full of lessons on compassion and kindness. In our everyday interactions, I think that most, if not all of us, try to show love and empathy to those around us. Whether it's a kind word to a stranger or support for a friend in need, these small acts reflect the love of Jesus. Another key aspect of living out our faith is service to others. Volunteering time, lending a helping hand, or engaging in community service projects are examples of this. By serving others, we can demonstrate the selfless love that Jesus exemplified.

One of my favorite volunteer activities ever was taking my dog to visit residents of a retirement community when we lived in Indiana. A group of 4-5 of us brought our dogs to a local facility on Wednesday evenings. We would visit residents in Assisted Living, the Memory Care Unit—and the Rehab and Nursing Home Units. Some residents were independent, while others were bed-ridden. Most of the residents loved our visits and really looked forward to Wednesday nights. Some had dog treats that they brought out each week and the dogs knew who had them! One resident in particular sticks out in my mind. Kathryn had been disabled by a stroke many years earlier. She scooted herself around in a wheelchair and couldn't talk except to say the words “pie tonight” but she lit up when she saw us and couldn't wait to pet all the dogs. I did this regularly for 8 years and she was there the entire time. We knew that we made her week better. Sadly, I think that the group disbanded during Covid and has not continued. But, in my mind, it is a great example of sharing love with others and something I felt privileged to be able to do.



Joyce Alley is a lifelong Episcopalian and grew up at St. Francis. After a 32-year hiatus in the Midwest, she and her husband, Chris, have been back at St. Francis for almost 9 years. She loves living in Palos Verdes, loves her family (especially 2 little granddaughters:), her dog, Remy, St. Francis and her church family!

Thursday, April 3

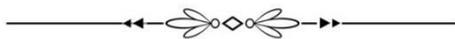
Jeremiah 22:13-23; Romans 8:12-27; John 6:41-51; Psalm 73

“Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his own people work for nothing, not paying them for their labor.” Jeremiah 22:13

The message is meant for the King of Judah, but it resonates with me. In the verses that follow, Jeremiah spells out the evils of accumulation of ostentatious wealth by unjust means, mainly the denying of others the pay for their labor. It hits close to home in 2025 here in Southern California. It is often easy for me to pretend that I am not rich, that the quality of my life by local standards is merely so-so. It is equally easy to ignore that the great wealth I and my family enjoy, the absolute luxury we live in, and the ease of our lives, which is a rare commodity in our own country, let alone the world. Indeed, Jeremiah’s message speaks to me, even though our house has no upper rooms.

In America our media remind us, almost ceaselessly on television, in movies, and on Instagram, that despite all evidence to the contrary, we need more stuff, new stuff, bigger stuff. The stuff we have is not broken, just not new. We measure the success of ourselves and our neighbors with the yardstick of capitalism—how much do we have, what do we still “need.” For most of my life, I have justified this often obscene materialism by pointing out the largess of America in international aid, but even that seems old hat now—too little tangible return on investment. Our culture has now embraced excess that would make Jeremiah write another book, no doubt. We willingly adorn our upper rooms with as much cedar as the forests of Lebanon can produce, and then some. All of it doesn’t make us any happier, though it does make us worthy of God’s condemnation.

This passage speaks to me as I finish teaching The Great Gatsby in my English classes for the umpteenth time. Fitzgerald is quick to point out that once the lights go out at Gatsby’s house, the party is over, and nobody is around for his funeral. We will not be remembered for what we have had, but for what we have given, for it is in the giving that we receive.



Tim Coleman is an English teacher at Palos Verdes Peninsula High School. He, his wife Julie, and their daughter Alice have been members for St. Francis for the last 10 years.

Friday, April 4

Jeremiah 23:1-8; Romans 8:28-39; John 6:52-59; Psalm 107

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God...”

Romans 8:28

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.”

John 6:56

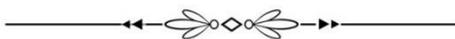
“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, not height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38

“If God is for us, who is against us?” Romans 8:31

When I see what is happening in the larger world and when I bump up against difficulties in my own life, I find that it is easy to get into a pattern of churning out solutions and worrying about things that are out of my control. On days when I’ve worn myself out with seeking solutions and have had my fill of anxiety (and social media!) about the world’s problems, not much feels like God is in it.

However, the passages above are crystal clear that God stands with us! God is here, now, in everything that is happening in our lives, and nothing can separate us from that Divine Love. Maybe it just me, or maybe it’s a lot of us, who forget this. We bumble along in a state of spiritual amnesia, fretting about our lives and the world, forgetting that if we seek God in everything we are confronted with, we will find God.

I think the trick might be to look for God first, before the solution is sought, before the analysis is conducted, before the opinion is formed. If I can approach the world seeking God in everything first, then maybe I can recover from my bouts of spiritual amnesia and take a viewpoint based more fully in faith, compassion, and love.



Holly Valiquette has been a member of St. Francis for nearly 30 years. She has served our beloved church in many roles over the years and is deeply grateful for being part of the St. Francis family.

Saturday, April 5

Jeremiah 23:9-15; Romans 9:1-18; John 6:60-71; Psalm 33

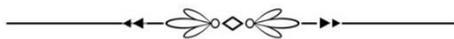
“When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?’ Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.’” John 6:60,66,68

Jeremiah, the last of the prophets before Judah fell to the Babylonians and the people were sent into exile, offers a stern warning. Beware of leaders who commit adultery, spread lies, and strengthen the hand of evildoers, allowing ungodliness to spread throughout the land. What can we glean from today’s passages that might offer a better way?

John’s Gospel provides an answer. In it, we find some disciples having difficulty accepting Jesus’s earlier pronouncement that he is the bread of life (John 6:35) and that to have life one must eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood (John 6:53). Put another way, Jesus is suggesting we inwardly digest the teachings He sacrificed His life for so that we might have life and outwardly reflect it through our actions. What did Jesus teach us?

Jesus boiled it all down to love God and love your neighbor. When asked who we should consider to be a neighbor, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan where a foreigner showed the “other” mercy. Jesus’s message could not be clearer. We are called upon to worship our one God, not earthly leaders who can drive us astray towards ungodliness. And, we are called to care for others—especially the sick, the marginalized, the oppressed, the immigrant, just as Jesus did.

That leads us to one final question. Will we reject these notions and turn away like the many disciples described in John’s Gospel, or will we heed Jesus’s teachings and the warning from the prophet Jeremiah?



Jack Hailwood is retired and a life-long Episcopalian. He and his wife of thirty-two years, Frances, have two grown children, a son who lives and works locally and a daughter who is attending seminary in Washington, D.C.

Sunday April 6



The things which you learned and received and
heard and saw in me, these do, and the
God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:9

Monday, April 7

Jeremiah 24:1-10; Romans 9:19-33; John 9:1-17; Psalm 31

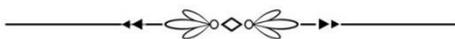
“In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge . . . Be my strong rock; . . . for the sake of your name, lead me and guide me. . . . Make your face to shine upon your servant, and in your loving-kindness save me.” Psalm 31:1a,3,16.

Almost daily I need to remind myself to “let go and let God” rather than to fret over life’s decisions and anxieties. My usual response to problems is to imagine and reimagine various solutions, even sometimes losing sleep at night. However, here the Psalmist reminds me that I have a loving God who can hear my petitions and set me on a right path. A prayer for guidance in the Book of Common Prayer reaffirms this: *“Grant us . . . the grace to ask what you would have us do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices . . .”*

Never was this mindset so crucial than when I was the caregiver for my late husband, Keith, during the years that he struggled with dementia. Situations changed almost minute-by-minute and often there were absolutely no correct answers or actions. Frustration became virtually unbearable at times, and I don’t know how I could have endured were it not for the ability to become still and ask for God’s help and inner peace.

The New Testament reveals Christ as our advocate with the Father, and, since He (Jesus) lived on earth and experienced all human emotions, we can be assured that He fully understands our trials and tribulations, and that what we ask God, in Jesus’ name, will be heard and answered.

It is not easy for me to still my mind and concentrate on God, so I must use strategies that will get me to that point. In addition to trying to set aside a few minutes each day to meditate, I also will very briefly close my eyes throughout the day, breathe deeply and recite a short prayer. My favorite is from the Prayer Book on page 323 which begins, “Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open . . .” How do I know that God has heard and is showing me His way? If I am patient, a way forward, or words will just come to me and feel “right” when I most need them.



Laurie Anderson has been an active member St. Francis for 20 plus years. She is an “8-o’clocker”, has served on the Vestry twice before Covid, was a reader and chalice bearer, and now serves as a reader or greeter.

Tuesday, April 8

Jeremiah 25:8-17; Romans 10:1-13; John 9:18-41; Psalm 124, 125 or 126

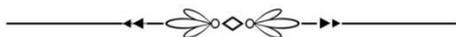
“Therefore the Lord Almighty says this: ‘Because you have not listened to my words ...’” Jeremiah 25:8

“He answered, ‘I have told you already and you did not listen.’” John 9:27

“Just because I didn’t listen doesn’t mean I didn’t hear you.” This is a classic quote from my husband that has kept family members laughing for years; it is so *him!* But, there is something so profound in that quote about human nature and relationships. And, he is not the only one who hears without listening. In the book of Jeremiah, God is so frustrated with people who “would not listen to My words” that He is about to pour out His wrath on them. Frustration is also expressed by the blind man cured by Jesus. I’m guessing that a lifetime of blindness had made him a keen listener. So, when the Pharisees questioned him a second time, he was bold enough to say, “I TOLD YOU ALREADY AND YOU DID NOT LISTEN!” (In deference to my imagination, I added the ‘caps’ and exclamation point.)

In the hearing vs. listening examination, I need to turn the lens upon myself. Listening is essential to being in a relationship. So, how is that going in my relationship to my Lord? While I tell myself I am *really* going to listen to the scripture readings this week, my mind goes on an unbidden wander. I might be hearing the words while my mind is making out the grocery list or scheduling my week. Am I really listening? Sometimes, I do a silent “snap out of it” to come back to attention. But then, another thought might derail *listening* to God’s word. Such is human nature, right? But there is a darker side than mere wanderings. Sometimes, I hear the words of the Lord but I don’t really *want* to listen. “What, I’ve got to love *THAT* neighbor!?”

God is the perfect listener. He lets me approach again and again to ask forgiveness and to request that He make me a better listener (while helping me love *THAT* neighbor!).



Sharon Craig-Insalata is a retired educator who currently enjoys helping in Sunday School. She spends weekday afternoons having fun with her six-year-old granddaughter Mae. Sharon also loves reading and long walks. She also enjoys listening to (or, at least hearing) her husband!

Wednesday, April 9

Jeremiah 25:30-38; Romans 10:14-21; John 10:1-18; Psalm 130

“Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.” Psalm 130:1-2

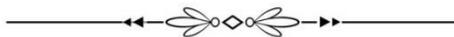
Psalm 130 speaks to us about faith and forgiveness. In the beginning, we hear a plea from the psalmist: “Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord, Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.” So often we forget to ask for God’s help until it feels as though we are drowning. We call to Him for assistance and relief when we feel as though we have tried everything else.

There have been many times in my life where I have slogged through a difficult situation for days or weeks before it occurs to me to talk to God about it. So, I spend some time talking to God, and I feel better. And then I feel like a “ding-dong” because I could have felt God’s peace much sooner.

Asking God for help is not a sign of weakness; it is an acknowledgment of our humanity and His divinity. It is in these moments that we recognize our limitations and His boundless grace. The act of turning to God in prayer can be a profound reminder that we are never truly alone. Even when we feel isolated in our struggles, He is there, ready to offer us comfort and guidance.

Psalm 130 continues with the assurance of forgiveness and redemption: “If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.” This passage reassures us that no matter how many times we falter, God’s mercy is ever-present. It invites us to let go of our burdens and trust in His unfailing love.

In the quiet (or sometimes loud and sobbing) moments of prayer, we can find the strength to persevere and the clarity to see a way forward. Through this divine connection, we are reminded that our prayers are heard, and that God’s help is always within reach, waiting to uplift us from the depths of our despair.



Jennifer Shelby is a full-time wife, mom, and public school teacher. She is also a Buffy the Vampire Slayer aficionado and part time sermon editor.

Thursday, April 10

Jeremiah 26:1-16; Romans 11:1-12; John 10:19-42; Psalm 140

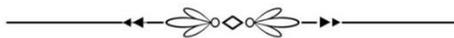
I thought people denying doing wrong was learned behavior until I had children. My kids denied every charge levied against them as soon as they were able to shake their heads from side to side. There was a time I saw our daughter push her younger brother to the floor, and she knew that I saw her do it, yet when I said, "Don't push your brother - keep your hands to yourself," she quickly retorted, "I didn't push him, he just fell!"

Jeremiah is warning the people of Judah that unless they turn from their wicked ways God will destroy them and their city. Instead of heeding his warning and turning from evil, they decide to kill Jeremiah.

Lent is a time for us to return to the Lord. There are multiple things that keep us from turning to the Lord, but they all fall under the umbrella of sin. This is why we focus so much on sin during Lent; before we can return to God, we first must remove whatever is impeding us.

I think the reason we are so reluctant to admit our faults/sins is that we often feel defined by them. But we are not the sum of our mistakes or sins. That we would kill the messenger rather than heed the message points more to our fear of being imperfect than any evil that dwells inside us.

It is our dread of displeasing God that keeps us away from God. But there is nothing we can do that will make God love us less, nor is there anything we can do to make God love us more. We are perfectly loved and forgiven, and when we learn to forgive ourselves and others, we will embrace our creator.



The Rev. Jason Shelby has been the rector of St. Francis for just over two years, and a priest in the Episcopal Church for nearly 18. He is the lucky husband of Jennifer Shelby, and together they have three children who keep them busy and thankful.

Friday, April 11

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-13; Romans 11:13-24; John 11:1-27 or 12:1-10; Psalm 141

Are there certain words or phrases in the Bible that immediately get your attention? For me, one word that always causes me to sit up and take notice is “Gentiles.” Gentiles are people not of Jewish descent so I pay particular attention to the message as in my mind it directly applies to me.

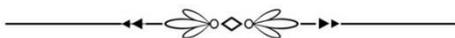
In the Bible, God’s Chosen People are generally described as being Jewish. The Gentiles are also referenced in many books of the Bible, more in the New Testament than the Old Testament. The Romans selection for today is directed to the Gentiles and God uses a figurative, graphic depiction of God’s cultivated tree to describe the Gentiles’ place on the tree.

The Gentiles are said to be like branches of a wild olive tree that have been made a part of the cultivated tree and it’s stressed that this is not a natural situation. These human “branches” have taken the place of others that have been cut away because they did not have faith. It’s noted that “when Israel rejected God, the rest of the people of the world were able to turn to him.”

The Gentiles have been given this position because they do have faith. The verses go on to say that the Gentiles could be replaced as well if they do not continue to be faithful and not be proud: “don’t think you are better than the original branches that were cut away.” It seems the roots of this cultivated tree are God and the power is in God’s hands.

A further warning goes on to say that the original branches that were cut away could be made to be part of the cultivated tree again. This reminds me of the principle of “getting rid of the dead wood to make room for new growth”, something I’m sure we all do in our own gardens.

These verses in Romans I believe are reassurances for us that having faith allows all people to be recipients of God’s and Christ’s love if they continue in faithfulness and resist pride.



Cheryl Gutierrez has been a member of St. Francis for 31 years. She and her husband, Hector, have one daughter and are blessed with a 4-year-old granddaughter, who participated in the Family Christmas Pageant for the first time last December. Cheryl enjoys being a member of St. Teresa’s Guild and volunteering her time helping the students the St. Francis Outreach Scholarship Fund supports.

Saturday, April 12

Jeremiah 31:27-34; Romans 11:25-36; John 11:28-44 or 12:37-50; Psalm 43

*“You are God, my stronghold. Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?
Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me;
Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.
Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight.
I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.”* Psalm 43:2-4

How many of us place conditions upon God? “Dear God, prove that you are on my side, and I will go to church every Sunday and do everything you ask. God, give me a sign, and THEN I will do the hard thing that is before me. Show me your holy mountain, and THEN I’ll write songs praising you.”

In Romans, it is written that God made us imperfect, so that we would always know in our hearts what it means to be an imperfect thing forgiven by a loving God; so that we should never have the excuse, “Well no one did anything for ME, so why should I do anything for anyone else?” The greatest thing has already been done for you, according to Romans 11:32. “God has bound everyone over to disobedience, so that He may have mercy on them all.”

At first reading, that might seem like an odd thing for God to do. Why not just make us all obedient and perfect? Then no one would need to have mercy on anyone, and everyone would be happy.

We would also be devoid of one of the most beautiful gifts God has given us. It is easy to love a perfect thing. How much harder is it, to love someone who constantly screws up, then blames you and rails against you, saying it is your fault, when they clearly did it to themselves? But that is the depth of love God has for us, and this gift, this wonderful gift; well, all we have to do is actually accept it, and let it in! We have to learn that when we’re lying awake at night, taking stock of everything we did wrong that day, that there is no screw-up too great, no failure too abysmal, that God will stop loving us. We imagine His rejection, because who could love someone as flawed a failure as us? But it *is* imagined. Flawed though we are, we have received unconditional grace. When we can truly believe that, and really allow ourselves to accept this overwhelming belief in unconditional mercy, it cannot help but spill into praise, song, and mercy for others; fulfilling God’s promise of mercy for all – no conditions required.



Shelley enjoys singing in the choir on Sundays and writing fantasy novels set in her homeland, Wales.

Palm Sunday

April 13

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be based, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Philippians 4:11-12

Monday, April 14

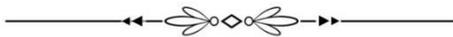
Jeremiah 12:1-16; Phil 3:1-14; John 12:9-19; Psalm 69

“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 3:13-14

Reading the third chapter in Philippians, I found myself reflecting on my past and my relationship and faith in Jesus Christ. In the beginning of this chapter, Paul invites us to reflect on the power of leaving our past behind: “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14).

I grew up in a very dysfunctional family environment, distracting myself by being outside and playing with my sisters. As I became a teenager, I realized through my faith that I could overcome the feelings of negative self-worth by attending church by myself and trusting in God as my leader in life. God and my grandfather led me to strive to do my best, love everyone, and spread kindness. Becoming a nurse helped me feel the reward of doing God’s will as a patient care advocate. I can count many miracles through the power of prayer, and I have felt the comfort of God’s hand when dealing with death and letting go. He seems to always come through for me.

Through my faith I feel comfort and spiritual strength and blessed that I had such a fulfilling career. My children are all believers as well; I hope that I lead them in that direction through my own beliefs and trust in miracles through Jesus Christ. Two of our grandchildren were critically injured in separate accidents. We all reached out for prayer and hoped that they would pull through to live a full life. By the grace of God, they are both healthy and doing well to this day. By trusting in God, I was able to move past my childhood and become the person that God put me here to be. Thank you, God!



Sue Ferme and her husband Jack are blessed to be proud parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. Their three sons are fighters/paramedics, and two grandsons are currently firefighters. Most of their family lives in Texas and Idaho, and they relish visiting them often. St. Francis has become Sue and Jack’s local family now, and they are so grateful to be part of this parish

Tuesday, April 15

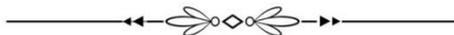
Jeremiah 15:10-21; Phil 3:15-21; John 12:20-26; Psalm 94

“Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.” Philippians 3:17

As I kept digesting the readings for today, it was this one sentence that kept popping up. Every time I read it, I was struck by all the people who have been an example to me.

Of course, we all have our parents, teachers, family, and friends to help guide us. But what else have you learned from others? It was my friend Lisa’s mom who taught me respect by reminding me to call her by her last name and not Mary Jane. It was my piano teacher who taught me not to lie. Mr. Mathias knew each and every time I didn’t practice my songs. It was a parenting class with Ms. Romy at Town and Country who taught me to try and give each of my 3 kids a 20-minute moment of Mommy time each day.

I am constantly surrounded by co-workers, friends, and my church family. These wonderful people in my life show me how to listen, how to see both sides of a situation, how to be slow to anger, and how to better love those around me. I hope and pray as time goes by, that what has been shown to me, helps others whom I encounter. As we all continue to see good, and be good, we will be more like Jesus.



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

Wednesday, April 16

Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14-17; Phil 4:1-13; John 12:27-36; Psalm 55

“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” John 12:27-28

The bitterness I held in my heart affected my friends and family not wanting to be around me ... I couldn't blame them. I did not like myself anymore.

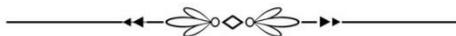
I questioned why I am here, alive after my first son's suicide, for which I blamed myself. My other two children and grandchildren distanced themselves from me. With no other living relatives, I felt all alone with no future here on earth. My life was dark, cold and had no purpose anymore.

On a sunny day last September, I felt a strong urge to take my dog Brodie for a walk along the beach even though I was numb. We had been walking a while, when in front of me was a message written on a cement bench: “Keep going, there's more to your story”. Was this a message from God? Yes, it was. Tears flowed from my eyes as I held Brodie. I thanked God for His Love for me.

The next day I returned to the beach to find another message on a different bench: “You matter, You are Loved, You are enough”. Another message from God? Yes, it was. He loves me. I am not alone.

That evening, while retrieving a CD, the book “Let Go” fell, hitting me in the face. I opened it and immediately read, “A cross which comes from God ought to be welcomed without any concern for self ... when we pick up the cross of Jesus and bear it in Love to Him, His Kingdom has begun in us. We must be satisfied to carry that cross as long as it is His will ... Every cross He gives us is for our profit ... so give yourself up to His plans, allow yourself to be led wherever He wants to lead you”. His message to me was, We need to carry our cross with Humility and Love.

That day turned my life around. I pray to God all that troubles my heart, not relying on man, as God knows my needs before I do. God blesses me daily with Peace and Joy, and I extend the same to others by volunteering at Torrance Memorial's NICU and making meals and flower arrangements for seniors in my complex. Doing these acts makes me happy because our Lord has given me these gifts. I have a purpose.



Diane Diekman has previously served on the Vestry and now enjoys serving as an Oblation Bearer and taking part in the Altar Guild, SAGES and Good Grief.



MAUNDY THURSDAY, April 17

Jeremiah 20:7-11; 1 Cor 10:14-17; 11:27-32; John 17:1-11(12-26); Psalm 142

“I cry to you, Lord; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.” Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.” Psalm 142:5-7

In thinking about both Maundy Thursday and David’s prayer in Psalm 142, I thought about humility; not humility as it relates to service, but about humility as it relates to acknowledging the need for help, in saying, ‘I don’t got this!’ (apologies for the grammar). Most of us feel the need to be strong and independent. We may even feel that asking for help is a sign of weakness, but is it? Maybe asking for help is a strength in itself. Calling upon family, friends, community, church, and God for help is healthy and healing.

Can any of us honestly say that we have never needed help with something? It can be as simple as reaching an item on a high shelf or as complex as a health issue or a loss. Engaging others in your plea may forge deeper relationships, and allow people who genuinely care to take an active role to assist and understand your challenges. It may also open a door for others to share the needs weighing on their hearts.

In Luke 11:9-10 it is written, *So I tell you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.* Some of the verbs here are ask, seek, and knock, right? These are the very actions we are supposed to take which can be difficult to do.

Asking for help may not come naturally or easily, but we can sure try.



Susan Tsuji came to St. Francis via the choir and has now sung in the choir for about ten years, and choirs in general since elementary school. She retired in December of 2024 and is doing her best to excavate (slight exaggeration) decades of accumulated stuff she just couldn’t part with previously (yup, some will be available at the rummage sale) and taking a couple of exercise classes while adjusting to retirement. Some of the things she enjoys are music, nature, photography, St. Francis Church, travel, family, pets (currently a tortoise and a cat), friends, puzzles, games... so many things!

GOOD FRIDAY, April 18



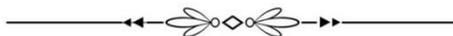
Wisdom 1:16-2:1, 12-22; 1 Peter 1:10-20; John 13:36-38 OR John 19:38-42; Psalm 40

I have a friend who says, “My problem with the Passion is that there is no way the Jews would have crucified Jesus during Passover.” After long thought, this is my conclusion: either the Jews did crucify Jesus on Passover, or the authors of the Gospels and Paul put the scene of Jesus’ death within the context of the Passover meal.

In either case, the hatred that the ruling Jewish elites had for Jesus was so great that not even the Passover kept them from having him murdered by the Roman Empire. Jesus had recently triumphantly entered Jerusalem; people ran ahead of him, throwing down their cloaks for him to walk on, and those without cloaks took down palm fronds and lined the street. He entered Jerusalem in Triumph in much the same way conquering generals paraded through Rome, yet Jesus was in no chariot drawn by gleaming, white horses. He was on a donkey, the ancient equivalent of an AMC Gremlin or Chevette.

The people loved him and hailed him as hosannah, or savior. If the people had Jesus, who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, what need would they have of the temple, priests, or scribes? What need would they have for the people selling animals for sacrifice, the money changers, or Herod? For the people in charge -- the people whose livelihoods were wrapped up in religion -- Jesus was a very real threat to their means of making money. They were afraid of being unneeded and unwanted, and their fear quickly turned to envy and hatred.

Fear does terrible things to our bodies, minds and souls; it robs us of peace, hope, and trust. We become feral in our myopic desire to survive at all costs. But hate only destroys. On this day, Good Friday, we remember the victory of hate over love. It is a difficult, heart-wrenching day. But it is not the end.



The Rev. Jason Shelby has been the rector of St. Francis for just over two years, and a priest in the Episcopal Church for nearly 18. He is the lucky husband of Jennifer Shelby, and together they have three children who keep them busy and thankful.



HOLY SATURDAY, April 19

Job 19:21-27a; Hebrews 4:1-16; Romans 8:1-11; Psalm 27

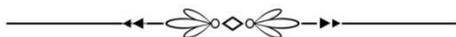
“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Hebrews 4:16

When I was younger, my favorite hymn was “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” (#688 in our hymnal) because I knew I needed God’s protection. I was under a lot of stress in high school and college to get and keep a scholarship, and when I went to work in the field of software engineering, I had a boss who disliked me and made my work life difficult. Throughout this part of my life, I knew I needed God as protector, as the hymn says “a bulwark never failing; our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.”

In my middle years, however, I started to study God’s word in more depth and learned about the mercy and grace that God provides, and not just His protection. When I think about the totally unmerited love that God has for me and His boundless grace, I am overwhelmed. I try to love everyone, but as a human being, I cannot love everyone equally—sometimes I encounter someone that I have trouble loving, no matter how hard I try. But God is so much more than I can imagine—his infinite grace applies to everyone. At this time, my favorite hymn changed to “Amazing Grace” (#671 in our hymnal). I especially depend on the fourth verse: “Through many dangers, toils, and snags, I have already come; ‘tis *grace* that brought me safe thus far, and *grace* will lead me home” (emphasis added by me).

The above quote from the letter to the Hebrews tells us to approach God’s throne of grace with “confidence,” which can also be translated “boldness.” Jesus told us to pray to the Father in His (Jesus’) name, to bring us directly to God’s throne of grace where we can “receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”. And so these days, I pray to God in the name of Jesus for His mercy and grace in my life, as I travel through the “dangers, toils, and snags” of older age, and for His help in loving everyone, especially those I have trouble loving.



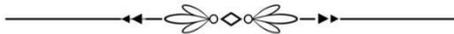
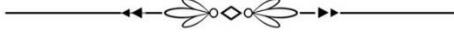
Suellen Eslinger joined St. Francis on-line in 2020 and became a member in 2021. She is a retired Aerospace engineer. Her principal hobby is music, and she sings in the St. Francis choir and plays the recorder. She loves learning about the Word of God.

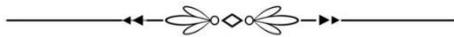
Easter Sunday



**I can do all things through Christ
who strengthens me.**

Philippians 4:13





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