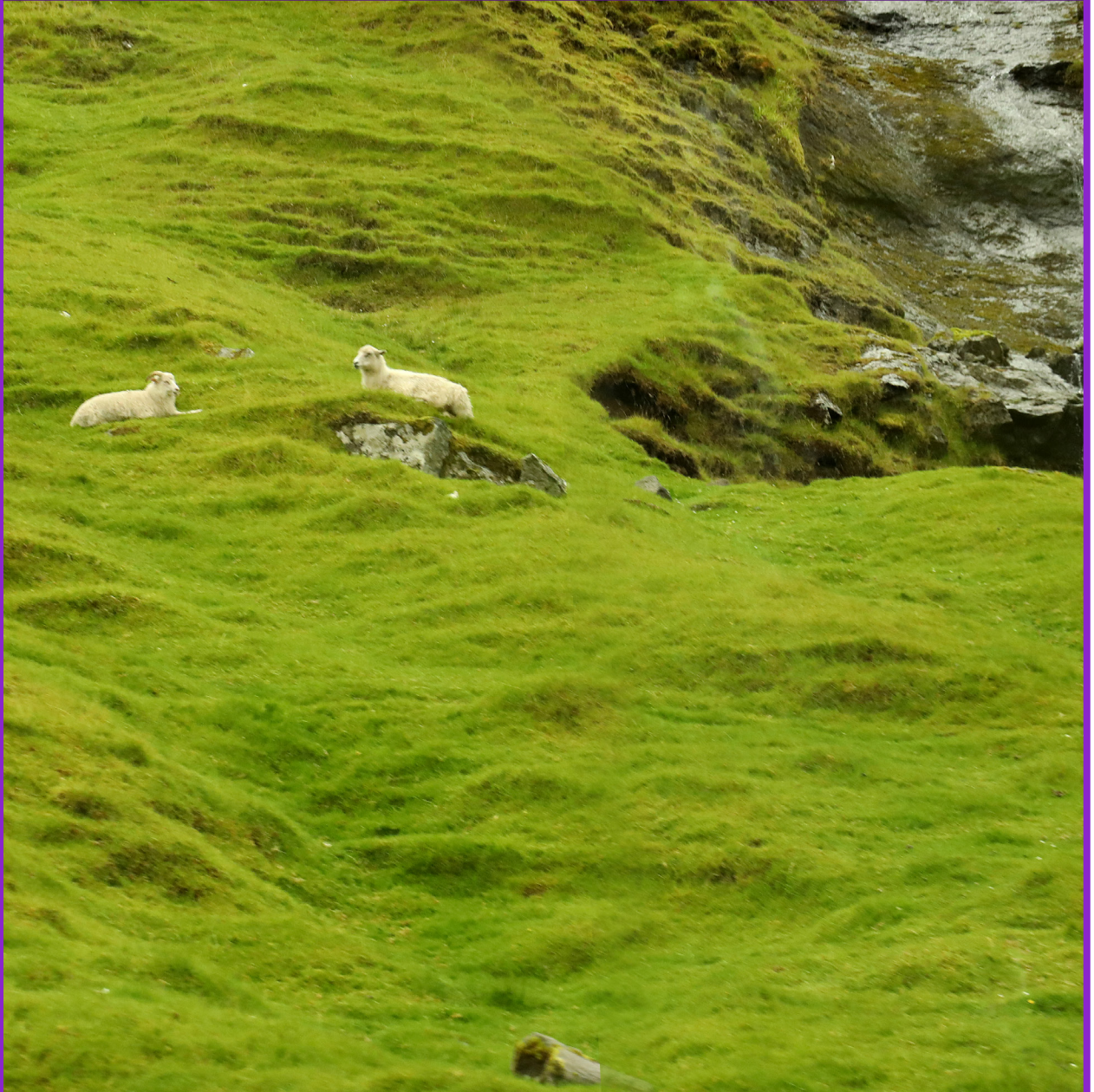


# 2020 Lenten Devotional

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church





# INTRODUCTION

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Dear Friends,

Practiced since the fourth century, Lent was traditionally a time when new believers studied the faith of the Christian Church and prepared themselves for baptism on Easter morning and entrance into the Christian community. Our Presbyterian liturgy for Ash Wednesday invites the whole church - new believers and old - to observe a holy Lent by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by works of love, and by meditating on God's word.

It has been a beloved tradition of Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church to engage in that call to prayer and the study of scripture together through this community Lenten Devotional. Though for many years, our devotional had led us through the stories and teachings of the New Testament, this year we return to an even more ancient tradition of meditation on the Psalms.

The Psalms are often referred to as a collection of prayers or even hymns covering the vast expanse of human emotion and faith expressions from joy and praise to lamentations and outright despair. Each week our writers have reflected on a single psalm, bringing to it their own expressions of faith, life experiences and hopes for the church and the world. In these Psalms and in these personal reflections, we will hear stories of gratitude for an unwavering faith as well as seasons when faith has faltered. We will read of people's confidence in the companionship of God as well as the companionship of one another. We will, most importantly, come to better realize this particular Lent, that we do not walk the journey of faith in isolation.

This year our Devotional also includes striking photography by BMPC member Bill Kemmerer. Bill has spent years documenting his travels to some of the most beautiful places in God's creation, and each photo selected helps to illuminate a piece of our weekly Psalms. I hope you enjoy the beauty of these photos and the ways they can help imprint the beauty of the Psalms in our mind and our heart.

In the Peace of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'R' and 'B'.

The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick,  
Associate Pastor for Adult Education and Mission

# ASH WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 26

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## *Psalms 51*

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. <sup>4</sup> Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgement. <sup>5</sup> Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

<sup>6</sup> You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. <sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

<sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. <sup>14</sup> Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. <sup>16</sup> For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.



# PSALM 51 - PRAYER FOR CLEANSING AND PARDON

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Thursday, February 27

Psalm 51 is attributed to David and was reputedly written after his seduction of Bathsheba and his order to murder her husband. For many years, when I read it or heard it read, I had trouble relating to it because I had never done anything that bad! But then, perhaps 20 years ago, it was read in an Ash Wednesday service in the BMPC Chapel, and I heard the words in a new way. It is a psalm of confession, penitence and hope that can speak to anyone at any time during the human journey. I now pray with it regularly during the Lenten season, and certain verses are frequently a part of my prayer during the rest of the year.

I often pray Verse 10 when I have stumbled yet again: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.* What does a clean heart look like? It is a heart in which brokenness is acknowledged and healed. It is forgiving and humble, free from anger, jealousy, resentment or fear and always growing toward being more loving. What is a new and right spirit? Some translations say a “steadfast spirit.” So I pray for a spirit committed to the abiding love of God. Depending on my need, I might pray for a generous spirit, a non-judgmental spirit, a joyful spirit or a grateful spirit.

Praying this Psalm helps me return to a right relationship with God, a relationship that has changed and deepened over the years. It is a grace to pray with these ancient words, and it is a grace that moves me toward living more in wholeness and love in the here and now.

*Karen Dunkman*

# PSALM 51 - PRAYER FOR CLEANSING AND PARDON

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**Friday, February 28**

The Psalms of lament are often associated with a time of mourning, but they are really an expression of praise — praise and petition offered to God when feeling God's absence. Down through the ages, all have asked, "Where is God?" In times of lament, we feel separated from God's presence. Walking alone in total darkness is a fearsome journey. Without God's presence, problematic solutions seem unrecoverable. Seeking a waiting God has opened my faith journey on countless occasions.

My God is an active, loving God who hears, intervenes, answers and offers protection. I am in relationship through Bible study and daily prayer. Being comfortable with silence at an early age offered the path to prayer. I began the practice of Christian meditation in the 1990s. It allowed me to focus and fill my mind with the self of God. Any emptiness is filled by the presence of God in my life.

Serving the PC(USA) at the congregational, presbytery and synod levels was transformational. Staying at the table of conflict opened by my willingness to listen deeply offered a non-judgmental response. As I trusted the voice of God, countless opportunities opened in my life to be in community. Again and again, the unseen God provided grace and forgiveness.

Our God is a listening God and each of us will experience turning points in our lives — often health related. In the evening years of my life, my faith only deepens. On a daily basis I hold to the promise that God will offer me a clean heart as I come to the throne of grace. There is nothing to fear in the future. God is already there!

*Janet W. Brown*

# PSALM 51 - PRAYER FOR CLEANSING AND PARDON

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Saturday, February 29

*“Why did I choose this psalm?”* Reading it for the umpteenth time, I instinctively rebel against much of what is written. All that blotting, purging, scrubbing and crushing. And don’t get me started on *“washed in the blood of the lamb,” “born guilty,”* or *“whiter than snow,”* touchstone phrases from my childhood evangelical faith. Even the word *“sin”* feels foreign. When did sin, a bedrock of my early faith language, become like the Harry Potter character, Lord Voldemort, the word that *“must not be named?”*

But over time, as these impulses settle, what hits me hardest is the prayer’s searing honesty. Whether I agree or not with what is prayed, it is crystal clear the psalmist is speaking their deepest truth to God. And I ask, *“What is prayer if not voiced honesty?”* and wonder, *“When did I last pray like this?”*

I’m also drawn to the phrase, *“Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.”* It’s a plea from one who knows well the pleasure of God’s presence, and at this moment, experiences its absence. The tension between memory and current state reminds me of a description of sin by the French theologian Jean Daniélou as *“the measure of a soul’s awareness of God.”* Would the psalmist’s intense desire for God exist without the sin creating separation?

Finally, after all this struggling, I ask, *“Where can I say ‘yes’ to what is written?”* For me, the prayer’s center is, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me,”* expressing a desire I feel to clear the underbrush obstructing my own and our collective views of God. I say *“amen”* to that.

*Paul Burgmayer*

# 1ST SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 1

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## *Psalm 32*

<sup>1</sup> Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

<sup>2</sup> Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. <sup>3</sup> While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup> For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

<sup>5</sup> Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord', and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. <sup>7</sup> You are a hiding-place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

<sup>8</sup> I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. <sup>9</sup> Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

<sup>10</sup> Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.



# PSALM 32 - THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

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**Monday, March 2**

When I first read Psalm 32, I was attracted to its theme of forgiveness, which is at the heart of my faith. Upon several rereads, however, I saw that the psalmist was focusing on the heavy burden of his personal sin. I thought to myself, imagine what terrible sin others might think I committed if I was drawn to this psalm. After all, I had not been tormented day and night by a conscious act on my part.

Proceeding through the week, though, I gained insights. During the Sunday morning call to confession, the pastor began, “If we believe that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.” Oops! Also, the Lord’s Prayer says, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” That means that forgiving someone else and being forgiven are intertwined and central to the Christian faith. I also recalled verses from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-22 when Jesus said, “Anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” I get that, but in the same breath, he says, “Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.” Murder may not be equated with anger, but to me the message is that *a sin is a sin*. And who hasn’t been angry?

The comfort of this psalm in my life is that God promises to instruct me in the way I should go. I feel free, trusting in God’s steadfast love. God is leading me into the future rather than punishing me for the past. It is not that I don’t make mistakes, but I am not concerned about judgment. The pain comes in the natural consequences, which I accept, because I am responsible for my actions. As a forgiven person, I feel lighter. I am more willing to act and take risks. The great benefit I feel is peace and joy. “Shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

*Anna May Charrington*

# PSALM 32 - THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

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Tuesday, March 3

Scholars call psalms like this penitential psalms. The Hebrew Bible calls the 32nd Psalm a *maskil*, alluding to its function as a kind of didactic song. These words are clearly about forgiveness, but they are not asking for forgiveness; they are teaching the value of forgiveness.

Nothing about forgiveness is easy. It's not easy for the one who asks for it, nor for the one who must decide if they will offer it. But the point of this psalm illustrates the danger of not seeking forgiveness. "As long as I said nothing, my limbs wasted away..." The power of confessing speech to heal, create, restore and reconcile is on full display. Our silence can wither us.

To be fair, I'm not always keen on forgiveness. I've been deeply hurt by others. Those I love have been deeply hurt by others. I've long considered it easier to just hold onto my grudge until I die and hope my offenders are all eternally punished. But the witness of scripture bears an opposite truth. Forgiveness is a saving and redeeming act. It's not just important for us to seek it from each other, but to seek it in our own relationship with God. Naming our own brokenness, and longing for a new way to live in spite of it, is a faithful response to the unfathomable grace of God.

William Barclay notes, "We must be clear about one thing regarding forgiveness. It is not so much the remission of penalty as the restoration of relationship. Nothing can deliver us from certain consequences of our sins; the clock cannot be put back; but estrangement from God is turned into friendship. The distant God is become near..."

Which means forgiveness isn't forgetfulness, it is a conscious choice God makes — and we can make — to experience restitution. Our discipleship in Christ will always be shaped by our capacity to acknowledge our own self-centered nature, and the work of mercy that merits our desire to be shaped into new creatures. The truth is, I will continue to wrestle with how I am called to forgive. But I hope my wrestling is grounded in the gospel reality that I've already been forgiven, and I am invited to do likewise.

*The Rev. Franklyn C. Pottorff*

# PSALM 32 - THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

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Wednesday, March 4



© Bill Kemmerer

"Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you;  
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them."

# PSALM 32 - THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

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Thursday, March 5

Psalm 32 is partially addressed to individuals. But the Psalmist David was a king; therefore, it also speaks to communities including the Church and entire societies. David proclaims, “Happy are those whose sins are forgiven...Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity.” This does not imply an assurance that the promised happiness is a life free of all suffering or disappointment, characterized as endless career success, health, prosperity and unfailing relationships. The happiness promised is not a series of perpetual highs, nor is it guaranteed protection from the inevitable adversities, successes and losses, finitude and mortality that everyone will encounter. It is not a promise of relief from the human condition.

There is a promise for individuals who sincerely repent of their sins, whether they are sins of pride, greed, spite or indifference to suffering around them. There also is a promise for societies that repent of their injustices, oppression, neglect of disadvantaged neighbors, acquisitiveness, brazen power assertions, assaults on the creation and the idolatry of blind nationalism. The promised happiness is the knowledge that all persons, whether individuals or communities, are prone to sin, to fail, to be indifferent when we should be engaged in meeting human needs in our families, in our community, in our church and in the wider world. The promise is that God is with us when we do the heavy lifting of repentance. Happiness comes from knowing that we can choose to transform our lives and to live in harmony with ourselves, our family and friends, our community and all creation. The psalm promises us a happiness not grounded in “feel good” but in living well, even in a world that always will serve us a variety of experiences, some good, some not, but with the confidence of our connectedness to other persons and to our Creator.

*Rich Allman*



# PSALM 32 - THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

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**Friday, March 6**

The adoption of my children this past July continues to be fresh in my mind, even as I read and reflect upon Psalm 32. We have all heard it before and will continue to hear it as we travel along our spiritual journeys: God forgives.

When my husband and I first accepted the foster placement of Anthony and Arabella in March 2017, we were aware of some of the challenges the biological parents faced, resulting in their children entering the foster system. We met the biological parents early on, and we will never forget the kindness they showed us, and how openly grateful they were that we were providing their children with a safe and loving home.

Days, weeks, months and years have passed, and we are no longer foster parents – we are now their forever parents.

As the joyful adoption day approached, in the back of our minds we felt more and more sadness for the biological parents. They both struggled with an addiction they were unable to overcome, allowing us to adopt Anthony and Arabella. No one has heard from the mother in over two years, but we have formed a friendly relationship with the father.

Forgiveness manifests itself in many ways. In this situation, for our family, we feel God's grace in knowing that the biological father has accepted us as the twins' forever parents. All adoptions do not end with biological parents giving their blessings on adoptions. But ours has.

Being a foster parent has been the most wonderful journey. We have learned so much about ourselves, not only as parents, but as people. It was impossible to know how this situation would end, but with certainty in God's steadfast love and bountiful forgiveness, we will forever "be glad in the Lord and rejoice."

*Edward Landin Senn*

# PSALM 32 - THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

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**Saturday, March 7**

Since 2005, the website [postsecret.com](http://postsecret.com) has posted anonymous secrets sent by mail. The postcards range from the humorous to the heartbreaking. Some are works of art while others are handwritten confessions. Despite changes and controversy, people keep sending secrets. I can understand why. There is a deep need to speak a hurt, name a wrong, or acknowledge a mistake. I also can understand why sending a postcard to a stranger is safer than speaking those words aloud. We know we're supposed to "move on" and "let go," and yet sometimes a postcard isn't enough.

Psalm 32 recognizes the impossible balance between speaking and silence, the difference between knowing a wrong and acknowledging it; the difference between holding on to something and seeking reconciliation. In worship, we practice naming our sins, seeking forgiveness, and ultimately embracing the grace that God offers. I can only speak for myself, but sometimes the silence following the prayer of confession is deafening, and the assurance of pardon feels hollow. Forgiveness is a gift freely given, but it can be a hard gift to receive, and even harder to acknowledge that we need it.

The power of Post Secret is that you are no longer alone with your secret — someone else can share your experience. Psalm 32 declares that God receives our confessions in love and offers rest. That promise takes on new life when read with Hebrews 4, assuring us that we are not alone in our struggles, but rather, "We have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, who in every respect has been tested[a] as we are...Let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Maybe we don't need a blog after all.

*The Rev. Rachel Pedersen*

## 2ND SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 8

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### *Psalm 121*

- <sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the hills —  
from where will my help come?
- <sup>2</sup> My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.
- <sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- <sup>4</sup> He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
- <sup>5</sup> The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
- <sup>6</sup> The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.
- <sup>7</sup> The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.
- <sup>8</sup> The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and for evermore.

# PSALM 121 - ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

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**Monday, March 9**

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills From whence cometh my help.”

So the psalmist looks to the horizon, hoping for some deliverance. There is no help near at hand; so perhaps out there, beyond the hills, there is salvation.

Our horizons have expanded rather dramatically over the past thousand centuries, from the Great Rift Valley of Africa to the mountains and valleys of the moon. We have measured the very bounds of our planetary system. We have sent objects beyond the solar wind. At this writing, Voyager One is over 13.5 billion miles from earth, beyond the heliosphere. Where is our horizon now? From whence cometh our help?

It has become commonplace to talk about the Copernican Revolution, that epochal moment when the earth, and humanity itself, could no longer be considered the center of the universe. If we are not the center, if everything does not revolve around us, then where is our horizon? Where do we look for help?

And yet this race of hairless bipeds has discovered, or intuited, that the entire universe can be understood mathematically. Even Voyager One, so many billions of miles from us, in such an alien void, can still be governed, understood, communicated with, in numbers. Numbers which we have invented to try to fathom things visible and invisible.

If even our farthest horizons can be plumbed mathematically, can we believe that the very heart of life is meaningless? If this tribe of apes has understood the workings of the universe, can we believe that the deepest wells of life are empty?

The last horizon is our limited understanding, and it is spanned by faith. We embrace a dark yet luminous mystery. We lift up our eyes to the hills, from whence cometh our help.

*Bill McKee*



# PSALM 121 - ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

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Tuesday, March 10

This is a psalm that lingers. It offers a beautiful promise supported by the grandest of evidence. The Lord who made heaven and earth is also the Lord who has kept nations and communities, who will keep you and me. And the Lord will do this forevermore.

“Forevermore” is the word that makes the psalm linger. As I say it I can feel its syllables hesitant to fully depart my mouth. Of course, I’ve said this word and the entire psalm countless times. The majority of memorial services I’ve had the privilege of officiating have included Psalm 121. Its content, and especially this word, provide hope amidst the most heartbreaking of moments. The words offer comfort that we serve a God who never walks away from us, never takes a break, and will always be with us. “Forevermore” embodies the promise that even when life ends here, it does not end forever.

“Forevermore” lingers because of how deeply I want this promise to be fulfilled. I want the Lord who is my help, who is my keeper, to guard me from all evil, to guard all of us from evil, and to keep our entire lives. When I lift up my eyes and see pain and suffering and death, I want God’s promise to keep our going out and our coming in forevermore to be fulfilled right here and right now. When I speak these words at a memorial service, I want the family to know God is with them, even if it might not appear to be the case.

This promise from God lingers in my heart. I focus my eyes on the God who will keep me – who will keep us – today and every day, no matter the circumstances. God is our keeper, forevermore.

*The Rev. Brian Ballard*

# PSALM 121 - ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

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Wednesday, March 11



"I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

# PSALM 121 - ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

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Thursday, March 12

Imagine being on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in ancient times, walking along a dusty road, looking up at the hills, and singing the words of Psalm 121, a song of ascents, i.e., the pilgrimage Psalms 120-124.

What a source of comfort, hope and assurance that our help comes from God, who watches over us. Whatever happens, God is there, never sleeping, our constant protector 24/7.

My first recollection of Psalm 121 was in high school, singing in the All-State Chorus. This was my first experience in such a large choral group and on such a large stage. The message we sang has sustained me since that time as a youth, as an important and favorite Scripture.

At some point along my journey of faith, when reading or studying the Bible, I started hearing music in my mind, music to which the sacred words have been set. It is a double blessing of Word and Song.

I have learned that so much of Scripture is sung: How often do we hear the music of favorite hymns or large works, such as George Frideric Handel's *Messiah*, when reading the beloved passages?

A particularly beautiful music setting of Psalm 121 is in Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. A trio of angels sing, "Lift Thine Eyes to the Mountains," and a choir of angels sing, "He Watching Over Israel." The clear, heavenly voices reach deep into my heart, while affirming the constant protection of God.

Music is a powerful way to learn and remember God's Word, beginning with teaching young children, and continuing through aging. Music is a way for the Lord to speak to us in times of need, and of joy.

Songs children learn stay with them. Older people who have lost memory often recall and find peace in hearing favorite hymns.

I pray that you receive a double blessing of Word and Song as you read Psalm 121 this day.

*Dorothy (Dottie) Bowen*

# PSALM 121 - ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

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Friday, March 13

In 2017 a small group from Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church traveled to visit with our Presbyterian Mission Partners in Lebanon and Syria. Our days were spent talking with pastors in Lebanon and Syria about their calling to welcome Syrian refugees into their communities, to help provide educational opportunities for children, and to ensure that all people were able to create lives of safety and security as they fled trauma and violence.

One afternoon we met in the basement fellowship room of the Presbyterian Church in Minyara with over 100 internally displaced Syrians who wanted us to hear not just their stories but their cries for help. It was overwhelming. I know that our group felt uncomfortable as pictures of lost sons who were forced to fight in the military were placed in our hands. We were paralyzed by the complexity of the problems and yet the simplicity of their requests - medicine, housing, food and safety. How could we be helpful?

When we gathered the next morning to check out of our hotel, which had rolling blackouts though the night, I spent time out on the balcony of the hotel that had a perfect view of one of the many mountain ranges in Lebanon and Syria, and the words of Psalm 121 came immediately to my mind - *I lift my eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.* I could imagine the psalmist looking at these exact mountains with an intense hope upon them, or above them, or even beyond them, that help might be at hand.

I continue to contemplate the ways we are called by God to be the answers to each other's prayers and especially each other's cries for help. For me, as much as this psalm provides voice for my own prayers to God, it also compels me to listen for the voices from the other side of the mountain who might be crying out in need.

*The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick*



# PSALM 121 - ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PROTECTION

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**Saturday, March 14**

Assurance, comfort and peace! Those are the feelings that settle in me when I read Psalm 121, and I suspect the same held true for the psalmist millennia ago. Often thought to be a psalm for the traveler, most likely on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Psalm 121 speaks to the presence of God along the way. But it's not so much a trip to wherever when I search for that companionship, although that's surely comforting too. It is the sometimes tricky journey through life which compels me to seek that closeness to God to put my mind at ease, to let me know that no matter how this plays out, I've got a mighty power traveling with me. I think about my spiritual journey, which for me really began as a young adult. Lots of uncertainty, doubts, questions, but the constant was God. No matter how unsure I felt at times, there was comfort in knowing that God was my north star, the foundation from which I could not be moved.

I think about the rough years of raising a recalcitrant teenager, whose mission seemed to be to cause us concern at every turn. Nothing in our power and ability seemed to be enough, but the little sign I kept on my bathroom shelf, "Out of difficulties, grow miracles," was a constant reminder that God was my keeper and that we would be okay. I think of the health scares that inevitably have come along over the years. When feeling so helpless, the knowledge that God is walking with me through the darkness gives me the strength and courage I need to move forward. It is in times such as these that I dig deeper into scripture and prayer and, yes, am assured that God travels with me on life's journey, offering me great comfort and even peace as the keeper of my life, now and forevermore.

*Peggy Gregg*

## 3RD SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 15

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### *Psalms 95*

<sup>1</sup> O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! <sup>2</sup> Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

<sup>3</sup> For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. <sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. <sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

<sup>6</sup> O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! <sup>7</sup> For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice! <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, <sup>9</sup> when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

<sup>10</sup> For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways." <sup>11</sup> Therefore in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest."

# PSALM 95 - A CALL TO WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

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**Monday, March 16**

How blessed are we by our almighty and powerful God, our King! We revel in the beauty of his Creation, the freshness of each season, each sunrise and sunset His gift to us in the glorious, multi-colored skies. We view the marvelous majesty of His mountains, and the crashing waves of His immense oceans. Even further, He amazes us with all the creatures with whom we share the world: those that fly above us, swim beneath us in the sea, prance and gallop on the plains, all together praising His glory and returning to Him the deep love and care with which he eternally blankets us.

The imagery that resonates with me here is what Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann has noted: God “(Yahweh) as artist is portrayed as a potter, who with skill, sensitivity and delicacy form the human person, forms the animals and birds and the earth, and forms Israel.” Verse 7 crystallizes the continuing theme spread throughout the Old and New Testaments, and specifically in Psalms 80, 100 and our most familiar and beloved 23rd Psalm. On that topic Brueggemann again notes that “Israel, as the flock of Yahweh, lives in the glad trust of the Shepherd:

For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture  
and the sheep of his hand (vs. 7) <sup>2</sup>

Despite the mention of God’s frequent Old Testament tendencies toward anger and retribution in verses 8-11, we know that nothing in heaven or on earth can separate us from the love of God. Our greatest comfort is that our rock and our redeemer, our Shepherd and our salvation stands with us through good times and bad, sickness and health, joy and sorrow. For if God stands with us, who can stand against us?

*Morris Kay*

<sup>1</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of The Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Augsburg Fortress, 1997.

# PSALM 95 - A CALL TO WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

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Tuesday, March 17

In Christian liturgical tradition this psalm is called the *Venite* (“come” in Latin). It is a psalm of invitation — invitation not just to praise God, but also to respect God by listening to what God wants to say to us.

In the midst of their praise, of remembering God as savior (v. 1), creator (vv. 4-5) and caregiver (v. 7), the people of Israel are invited to reflect on the danger of becoming hard-hearted and oblivious to God’s call. By remembering their ancestors’ sins and punishment, the people can avoid repeating the past and can prolong their lives in the promised land, the place of God’s rest. The theme of rest evokes the Sabbath, and in the Jewish tradition, this psalm is read on Friday night (Sabbath eve) services, marking a call to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy as God has instructed.

How can this psalm speak to us Gentiles? Like the people of Israel, our ancestors sinned. Our nation was founded on noble principles, but also on the displacement and death of the original Americans. Our national fortunes were furthered through enterprise and industry but also through the enslavement of African people. Our borders were extended not just through peaceful purchases of land, but also through wars. We have acted in the world, not just for justice, but also to further our own interests at the expense of others.

Like the people of Israel, we are in danger of repeating the sins of the past if we do not take heed. Prejudice and narrow pursuit of self-interest continue to flourish, and we are all tied into them in a multitude of ways. Today, and every day, let us dedicate ourselves to work for a nation and a world in which all have a place to call their own, in which the needy are cared for, and in which those who can work have the opportunity to work for fair compensation.

*Joshua Yoder*

# PSALM 95 - A CALL TO WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

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Wednesday, March 18



© Bill Kemmerer

“In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.  
The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.”



# PSALM 95 - A CALL TO WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

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Thursday, March 19

My earliest memories always included music: Mom's lullabies, hymns at church, Christmas carols, and singing in the car wherever we went. While we were blessed with natural talent (some more than others), we also were instilled with a work ethic dedicated to perfect diction and pitch, by Mom, Jeff B. and other choir directors. At BMPC good music brings us all such joy that, and as hard as it is to admit it, anything less than excellence was unacceptable.

Fast forward to adulthood and a friend invites me to her church. Smaller than BMPC and a little more modern, but what blew me away was not the sermon or the full immersion adult baptism. It was the joy and passion with which they sang their hymns, despite their complete lack of musical talent! I could not believe it... how could someone sing so proudly and loudly, while being completely off key?!? My astonishment must have been evident because my friend said something I will never forget. "It does not matter how bad it sounds as long as you mean it!" She was willing to stand there and sing her flat and sharp notes as loudly as the next person, because she loved the Lord and wanted Him and everyone else to know it!

My friend taught me two very important lessons that night. 1.) God does not expect us to be perfect. Instead He wants us to live a life of purpose, love and compassion and mean it with our whole hearts! We will stumble, make mistakes and fail often, but as long as we work hard to follow His example and "mean it," He will be pleased. 2.) Never be ashamed to praise your God with full voice and full heart! Just because you cannot pray perfectly in public does not mean you should cringe when asked to give the grace. Just because you are not a master carpenter does not mean you cannot help with a Habitat for Humanity project. Or even, if you are not a solid soprano does not mean you cannot join in the Hallelujah chorus on Easter Sunday! A "joyful noise" has nothing to do with pitch; it is all about what's in your heart!

*Meggin R. Capers*

# PSALM 95 - A CALL TO WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

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Friday, March 20

This writing assignment about Psalm 95 was given to me almost two months ago, but I encountered writer's block until I received an email from a trusted companion that mentioned the mystery of God and how it had informed a recent action. This friend's words and deeds consistently provide a template for attunement to God, which I aspire to follow. As I thought about God's mystery, the words for this page began to flow.

Part of the difficulty in responding to Psalm 95 is my reaction to the direct strength of its words. The “joyful noise” and heights and depths — while inspiring — are wider than my muffled, self-conscious celebration. I try to sing quietly during worship so that my off-key notes are not audible. This mundane distraction strays from the “bow[ing]down” that is called for. The psalm includes a reminder to “listen to his voice,” and a reference to straying hearts. Most personally disturbing are the statements about loathing, and not entering God's rest. There are many times that I avoid — and even actively reject — God. At a recent Sunday chapel service, we were reminded that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Though this grace is already given, I hope to do my small part. Thinking ahead to Lent, one way to honor God would be to sing hymns without reservation. As a wise person mentioned last Lent, the singing is for God. Also, I hope to more willingly “listen to his voice.” I don't yet know how. I will try to openly receive the Holy Spirit's guidance and to act on it.

*Anita Iyengar*



# PSALM 95 - A CALL TO WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

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**Saturday, March 21**

The first six verses of Psalm 95 were written as a “Yahweh-as-King” song, recognizing God’s rule and supremacy over other gods as revealed to us through his mastery of the creation. These initial verses are a celebration of all the earthly gifts that God had created. Verses 7 – 11 transition into a prayer and prophetic oracle that was a warning to Israelites to follow the word of God, and “not harden your hearts against God”; if they “tested” God, they too would suffer His anger just like their ancestors who wandered for 40 years in the wilderness and lived under God’s threat that “They shall not enter my rest (i.e., promised land).”

These prophetic words were written 3,000 years ago. One thousand years later, Hebrews 3.7 – 4.13 referenced Psalm 95 as a warning to early Christians that they also were not following the word of God. In these passages, Psalm 95 is the most extensive reference to a psalm in the entire New Testament.

While “civilization” has progressed since those times, we as a society are going through one of the most divisive and destructive periods in our history. Virtually all religions “preach” the golden rule, but do we practice it as individuals? Jon Meacham, in his book *American Gospel*, talks about the “Public God” that has unified Americans in the past - the universal God of “In God We Trust.” We all need to find that Public God again. Psalm 95 is a reminder to me to do my part to be accountable only to God, to do the “right thing” for our collective good, and to be a positive example for others.

*William “Trip” O’Donnell*

## 4TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 22

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### *Psalm 23*

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;

<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.

# PSALM 23 - THE DIVINE SHEPHERD

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**Monday, March 23**

Surprisingly, I memorized the 23rd Psalm in fourth grade in public school as an assignment (obviously quite some time ago; i.e. the early 1960s). I can no longer recite the lines perfectly, but the words have always resonated with me.

Since my faith has been inspired by nature, “green pastures” and “still waters” were, and still are, a beautiful image for where God wants to lead me. I realized through these verses, however, that God doesn’t just want me to experience beauty and calm. God wants me to do the “right” thing. And God will be there to support me and guide me, as needed. Also, I will never be alone; I just have to seek God’s presence. I should never be afraid, regardless of circumstances; I just have to lean on God’s strength, his “rod and staff,” to get me through. Those words and their meaning were comforting reassurance to me as a child, and they mean even more to me every time I hear or read them.

The 23rd Psalm also reminds me that God wants more than to tell me what to do. God loves me and wants to be in a close relationship with me. I am to *know* God. This makes the gift of God’s son all the more meaningful. In Jesus Christ, God is revealed to us in new ways. The message remains clear: that ultimately, love is everything, and fears (even of death) will be overcome.

My journey in faith since fourth grade has been a crucial component of who I am, and I strive to glorify God in all that I do. I can’t imagine life without the reassuring presence of God and God’s grace. Because of it, my cup overflows!

*Donna Barrickman*

# PSALM 23 - THE DIVINE SHEPHERD

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**Tuesday, March 24**

Being a mother of two, married for many years, teaching school for 30 years, and getting my master's degree while I was teaching, created a very busy and challenging life for me. There have been many happy moments but, at times, life was wrought with difficulty.

During one of my most troubled times, I turned to Psalm 23, looking for the Lord's words and for His comfort and peace. I had no idea what might happen, so I needed to hear God's voice to give me the strength to carry on the best way I could. As I sat quietly, I began to recite Psalm 23 (to myself) over and over and as I did, the words, "Even though I walk through the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" resonated within my soul and began to give me the peace and serenity that I desperately needed. It was as if God was sitting by my side, holding me in His loving arms, telling me that all would be well.

For what seemed like an eternity; however, knowing that God was with me and feeling his spirit envelope me, was one of the most comforting times of my life. I sat motionless, quiet and calm knowing that "surely goodness and mercy would follow me all the days of my life and I would dwell in His house forever."

When the troubling situation was finally over, I was able to feel a tremendous weight being lifted off my body and was able to feel that, indeed, my soul had been restored in a way I had never felt before. The words of the psalm and what they conveyed to me at a desperate time in my life, allowed me to sing God's praises forever. For "the Lord is my Shepherd" in ways I never imagined.

*Sally T. Nelson*

# PSALM 23 - THE DIVINE SHEPHERD

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Wednesday, March 25



© Bill Kemmerer

"He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters."

# PSALM 23 - THE DIVINE SHEPHERD

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Thursday, March 26

Personally, I prefer the King James version of Psalm 23. I'm not sure there is a more calming, reassuring passage in the Bible. And we're talking about death! How do you get from death to calm?!

Yea, though I **walk** through the **valley** of the **shadow** of death. How beautiful. I shall fear NO evil. I will be **comforted**. A valley, green pastures, shadow, no fear, restore, right paths, I am going to be cared for. It's all going to be okay. I've never believed it will all go away, but whatever the loss, it will somehow be okay. Even though I'm in a very dark place now, even if I am felled by the enormity of the death of a loved one, God will somehow guide me.

To believe that despite whatever has crushed me, my faith tells me I am cared for and will be honored, gives me great peace. A table will be prepared for me in the presence of mine enemies. My cup will be so full it will spill over. Wow.

I don't believe that any loss is ever going to necessarily be less, let alone go away. Different. A bit easier to live with and suffer with. Grow from. More greatly appreciate what is not lost. All these. I just "buy" this passage, that the world will not come to an end, that my life goes on, that although the loss will always be with me, and although I will certainly suffer more and perhaps even greater loss, more struggles, more difficult obstacles in the future, life will give me more joy also, that I will find beauty somehow in the loss and also in the recovery from that loss.

*Peter H. Craig*



# PSALM 23 - THE DIVINE SHEPHERD

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**Friday, March 27**

Psalm 23 is a reflection of one's life. It allows us to recognize that through all the struggles you may have faced, the Lord is with you and will continue to be with you through everything. In my life, the message that, "He guides me along the right paths" holds true, especially in times where I feel as though there are truly no more options left.

One of those times occurred recently, in which I felt trapped, stuck at the Haverford School for boys, due to my family lineage there. I did not fit in well and was entering eighth grade at Haverford when it became obvious that I was never going to be happy there. I thought: Where else is there to go? Haverford was all I had known, and I lived in such a sheltered environment that I truly did not know there were other schools near me.

Even when I felt like I was all out of moves, the Lord took me and guided me to the Lower Merion School District. He guided me on a path that has given me the opportunity to choose between Penn State and Pittsburgh for my next step in life due to my successes in high school and has led me to a new understanding of myself and the person I strive to become. As Psalm 23 states, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me?" There is so much truth in this statement. I know this because I have walked through some dark valleys, but I always come out on the other end, thanks to the Lord's guidance and love.

*Jack Odiorne*



# PSALM 23 - THE DIVINE SHEPHERD

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Saturday, March 28

As a child, Claire's image of God was a loving Lord who was there to help provide protection from evil. "I still see Him in the same light, and embrace this psalm as a positive and spiritual prayer that helps remind me of his presence in my life. Reciting this verse at church is a wonderful opportunity to keep Him with me in my daily experiences. I see God as a shepherd who helps me fulfill my daily needs, provides love and encouragement, and enhances my spiritual growth."

Jeff thinks back to when he was a six or seven year old Sunday school student. "Psalm 23 is probably the first biblical text I ever memorized. As a child the psalm provided me reassurance that God loved me and would always be there to provide the things I needed. The images of Him *anointing my head with oil* and *my cup running over* filled me with gratitude at a very young age because I knew that I had done nothing to deserve them. I was born, and by grace, I had received a gift. My reflexive response was, and always has been, to love God back. Loving God back requires being aware of one's gifts and privileges and channeling them to provide kindness and dignity to others."

Now we are 64 years old. Reflecting back over the decades it is easy to remember time spent walking in dark valleys as beloved family members struggled with life's adversities, friendships were strained or even lost, and open doors before us were slammed shut. During those times we remember that Psalm 23 provided reassurance of God's love and helped us in keeping thankful hearts. As time passes, it is possible to look back on the moments when we faced what seemed like horrible evil and realize that God did, in fact, still the waters and lead us to greener pastures. No wonder that we choose to dwell in the house of the Lord.

*Claire & Jeff Swarr*

## 5TH SUNDAY IN LENT - MARCH 29

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### *Psalm 130*

- <sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
- <sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!
- <sup>3</sup> If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?
- <sup>4</sup> But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.
- <sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;
- <sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.
- <sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.
- <sup>8</sup> It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

# PSALM 130 - WAITING FOR DIVINE REDEMPTION

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Monday, March 30

We often go to the psalms to find words that help us understand and express our feelings. Psalms of joy lift us up, the Shepherd reassures and comforts us, we can long for God like a thirsty deer for flowing streams and our gratitude swells when we consider, “What shall I render to God for all his goodness to me?” We should let the psalms guide us in our relationship with God.

Psalm 130 takes us in a different direction, however, and reaches us at our deepest depths — *Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord hear my voice!* What do we do when we find ourselves there? We don’t know much about the psalmist’s situation, but we have been in similar places of despair. Sometimes these feelings resolve themselves but other times they linger and press hard upon us. This psalm offers some advice to us about a new direction to head. He uses the image of the watchman waiting for the morning to describe his new place of waiting for God. The watchman waited for morning with the certain knowledge that the morning would come. Night might be long and dark and threatening, but the morning would come. So this psalmist does not linger in despair but moves to expectant hope in the Lord. That’s better than despair; maybe the situation hasn’t changed but you have.

Another observation about this psalm is that it starts out with the singular first person — *Out of the depths I cry to you!* It ends inclusively with the community to which the person belongs, that being the people of Israel — *O Israel, hope in the Lord!* He realizes he belongs to others. Isn’t that the best thing we can do when we are somehow desperate? Reach out to others and have them join us where we are. That always helps.

*David & Barb Heaton*

# PSALM 130 - WAITING FOR DIVINE REDEMPTION

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Tuesday, March 31

When you visit the remains of the Temple in Jerusalem you understand why some of the psalms are called the Psalms of Ascent, including Psalm 130, which pilgrims sang together as they journeyed up to the Temple Mount for Passover. Beginning with *Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord*, the movement of the psalm starts at a low place in the sheer geography of the landscape. For as one approaches Jerusalem, located between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, the lowest elevation on the earth, the city rises up out of the desert on a high and rocky plateau.

Going up to the Temple they literally rose as they sang. From the *depths* of the psalmist's cry in the first verse to the glorious promise of its ending, *Hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem*, the tone of Psalm 130 mimics the movement of pilgrims as they walk uphill to worship God.

The psalm's upward movement also models the spiritual journey of Lent as we make our way through Jesus' life to Calvary and the empty tomb beyond. From Ash Wednesday's reminders of dust and death, our Lenten rhythm begins with the mournful, minor key notes of human frailty and, following in the footsteps of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, we ascend to a resounding Alleluia of praise on Easter.

Over time Psalm 130 became known as *De Profundis* from the Latin translation of its opening words *out of the depths* and the word from which *w* is derived. The psalm certainly captures the profound nature of Lent's spiritual journey as a prayer of supplication which begins in human vulnerability and ends in the hope, redemption and love of God.

*The Rev. Dr. Agnes W. Norfleet*

# PSALM 130 - WAITING FOR DIVINE REDEMPTION

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Wednesday, April 1



© Bill Kemmerer

“My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.”

# PSALM 130 - WAITING FOR DIVINE REDEMPTION

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Thursday, April 2

This psalm, interpreted by some as a testimony of trust, starts with desperate cries of anguish and ends with the assurance of the great power of God's love for all his people. We are living in a time of great anxiety, uncertainty and turmoil — in our families, in our communities, in our country, in the world. Like the psalmist, we cry out for God's help, longing that he hears us and trusting that he will answer our prayers.

How can we find peace among the chaos? Every day my great struggle is to cease relying on myself and, instead, to completely trust God who will never forsake me. I think people are uncomfortable relinquishing control. They believe they are totally self-sufficient and able to solve the problems they may encounter. As Proverbs 3: 5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; and he will make your paths straight." I find that if I can "let go and let God," my anxiety about a situation is relieved, and I feel a sense of peace. I can think better! We must trust God, then wait and hope for his answer.

Sometimes our prayers are answered right away. At other times, we wait and wait and our prayers never seem to be answered. But we must never lose hope that God will answer in his own time and in his own great wisdom. My hope is in the Lord! I will never let go of that hope no matter what these times may bring! We have the assurance, just as a new day will dawn, that "with the Lord there is steadfast love" — everlasting and unfailing.

Praise and thanks be to our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior!

*Susan Thorkelson*



# PSALM 130 - WAITING FOR DIVINE REDEMPTION

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Friday, April 3

Out of the depths ...

Even a brief encounter with the news – the cable outlets, newspapers or social media (especially social media!) - makes me cry for more civility in our society. Sometimes it feels like there is more hate than love in our world. And, in moments of complete candor, I confess that I feel ill will toward the neighbor who plays loud music late at night, the driver on Montgomery Avenue who cuts me off in traffic, the relative who has 101 opinions about how I should lead my life. I realize that I am part of the problem.

In these moments I try to remember God's great commandment to love our neighbor. In His word, I hope. I hope that we as a people can accept God's love, that His love will animate our hearts and that His love will guide us in our relationships with other people.

I recently heard The University Singers at Washington and Lee University sing *Considering Matthew Shepard*, an oratorio that explores the life, death and legacy of Matthew Shepard, the victim of a terrible hate crime in 1998. I was struck by this excerpt:

This evergreen, this heart, this soul, Now moves us to remake our world,  
Reminds us how we are to be Your people born to dream, How old this joy, how  
strong this call, To sing your radiant care With every voice, in cloudless hope Of  
our belonging here.

What could be the song? Where do we begin? Only in the Love, Love that lifts us up.

Hearing 53 college students of different backgrounds sing these words with passion and conviction renewed my faith in the power of God's love and His gift of redemption.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

*Elliot Dee*

# PSALM 130 - WAITING FOR DIVINE REDEMPTION

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**Saturday, April 4**

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!”

The psalmist goes on to focus on God redeeming us from the depths of our sins. But how many of us have cried to God from the depths of our despair, the darkest times in our lives? More than a few, I imagine.

I have been living with depression for nearly 45 years — I was first diagnosed when I was in the ninth grade. While I am now “in remission,” as I call it, depression has at times incapacitated me. During a 12-month period from 2004 to 2005 alone, it landed me in the hospital psychiatric ward four times, and led to a quest by trial-and-error through nearly a dozen medications in search of one that would help regulate the chemical imbalance in my brain. During the search and even after doctors identified a medication that helped me, I spent most of each day — at work, at home, with friends, at church — either weeping or on the verge of tears, for no identifiable reason. How often I cried out to God: to help me sleep; to restore any bit of enjoyment to life; to give me the will to care about anything; but most frequently to make the pain stop, even if it meant letting me fall asleep and not wake up.

For a year and a half, I did everything — from getting out of bed to singing in the choir at church — out of force of habit rather than volition or even a sense of responsibility. While at church, words and music hardly registered with me, and yet I knew that this was the right place for me to be. I cannot claim to have heard the still, small voice of the Lord speaking to me; I can only explain this impression as God working through all means possible to make his presence known to me.

To this day, when my depression manifests and I cry out to God in despair, I take comfort in God’s presence and in the promise John relates in Revelation: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4, KJV).

*Brian Middleton*

## *Psalm 118*

<sup>1</sup> O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!

<sup>2</sup> Let Israel say, 'His steadfast love endures for ever.' <sup>14</sup> The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

<sup>15</sup> There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: 'The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; <sup>16</sup> the right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.'

<sup>17</sup> I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. <sup>18</sup> The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.

<sup>19</sup> Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

<sup>20</sup> This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

<sup>21</sup> I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

<sup>22</sup> The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

<sup>23</sup> This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. <sup>24</sup> This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

# PSALM 118 - THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

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Monday, April 6

It's Passover in Jerusalem. Despite all that Pontius Pilate and his Roman legions are doing to guard against any unrest when so many people gather for the festival, faithful Jews expect to offer sacrifices in the Temple – the house of God (*Beth El*). Processing up to the temple mount, they sing hymns of praise grounded in gratitude for their salvation from a period of exile.

The hymn they are singing is the last *hallel* in a group commonly sung at Passover then and now (Psalms 113-118). Indeed, the modern word hallelujah explains exactly what it is – a song of praise (*hallel*) to God (*Yah*). The hymn is framed with the same opening and closing stanza. It mixes the personal and corporate voice. As they walk the priest calls out: “Let Israel say.” And the people answer, “His love (*hesed*) endures forever.” Arriving at the gates of the Temple the priest shouts out, “Open for me the gates of the righteous” and hears the welcoming response, “This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous (*sedeq*) may enter.” As they walk up the mount, they see the temple's cornerstone, which they hold symbolizes Israel, previously despised by nations, but now protected by God and set at the center of the world. (Deut. 20:8)

In verse 5 the hymn hearkens back to the time when God's people were in exile in a narrow place (*meitzar* or *Mitzrayim/Egypt*) and were brought out to a spacious place (new life). We can sing these words today when we are brought out of the narrow spaces constraining our spiritual life and experience the same sense of salvation in an expanded embrace of life. The shout of verse 14 – “The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation” would have been familiar to the Jews of Jesus' time from Exodus (15:2): “The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.” The salvation (*yeshua*) the Jews saw in God's love is the Jesus we accept as its embodiment in our lives.

So, as Jesus and his followers finish the Passover meal that last night, they sing hallelujah to God for salvation/yeshua as they depart for the Mount of Olives and the fulfillment of God's promise (Matt. 26:30, Mark 14:26).

*Phoebe Sheftel*

# PSALM 118 - THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

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Tuesday, April 7

Growing up as a good southern girl, I always assumed I would marry a man, someone of the opposite sex. And my dad, a pastor, had always been pretty clear about what he thought about LGBTQ folks — that LGBTQ+ lifestyles were against God’s will for humanity. I recall my mother saying, when discussing marriage equality, that “if we let two people of the same sex get married, what was to stop someone from marrying multiple people or animals?”

I went off to seminary at Princeton when I was 25. It was there that I met someone named Meredith. Meredith was a member of the LGBTQ+ community *and* was going into youth ministry, just like I wanted to. I remember thinking to myself when I met Meredith, “They make those?! Queer youth pastors!?” And suddenly my world was flipped upside down.

Much ink has been spilled about whether or not I should be allowed to be a pastor, whether my beloved friend Meredith and other members of the LGBTQ+ community are called to be pastors. And then I remember that the religious and political leaders of Jesus’ day rejected *him*.

“I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

– Psalm 118: 21-22

The passage reminds me how profoundly God loves, values, and uses those whom the world rejects. With Christ as our cornerstone we then must ourselves ask, *who are we rejecting?* Whose wisdom do we miss because we so easily *dismiss* the people who are “other” than us? In this time of Lenten self-examination, we must challenge *ourselves* to seek out the wisdom of those rejected by our world.

*The Rev. Leigh DeVries*



# PSALM 118 - THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

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Wednesday, April 8



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“Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.”



# PSALM 118 - THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

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Thursday, April 9

The Psalms encourage us to communicate our honest feelings to God in prayer. They give us language to express anger, grief and despair, as well as praise and thanksgiving. Psalm 118 holds both the dark and the joyful in balance as we give thanks for God's goodness and steadfast love. Although we may be punished when we stray, we are ultimately restored to righteousness and salvation, rather than death.

In this Lenten season, we can use this psalm as a prayer of thanks as we reflect on Jesus's life and death as the ultimate act of salvation, expressed prophetically here: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone."

This psalm can also express our personal gratitude for the grace of salvation in our everyday lives. Salvation can have multiple meanings, different for different people. For me, it can include the experience in everyday life of being restored to a sense of trust, meaning and right relationship — to God, to others and to myself. In our culture, it is easy to get trapped into busyness, frustration and negative thoughts that can spiral down to the "punishment" of anxiety, anger, loss of hope and connection. The darkness of such lifeless subsistence usually eventually emerges into the light of life-giving grace, that restores our strength and right relations, whether in response to our prayer, through another's act of kindness or by other means. So, whether the downs of our lives are triggered by our own misguided actions and habits or by events beyond our control, Psalm 118 expresses our gratitude for God's steadfast love and salvation in restoring us to right relations with God, others and ourselves. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

*Patricia Danzon*

# PSALM 118 - THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

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Friday, April 10

We all face times when we need to be reminded that God's love endures forever. When things go bad, we wonder: Why would a loving God let us suffer? We question why things are happening to us and what or who is behind them. The truth is we don't know and we likely never will in this life. What we know is that God has given us His Word to guide us, His Holy Spirit to enable us, and His love to lean on as these things prepare us to live with Him in eternity.

The psalmist writes of incredible adversity and calls out to God in anguish. Yet in the midst of these struggles, he starts and ends with the same message of giving thanks and praise unto God. This psalm is a reminder that true joy isn't dependent on circumstance. Even though we may know this in our heads, learning to choose joy in hard times doesn't come easy. It takes effort from us; it requires our hearts to be set on God. Even on our worst days, the assurance that God made every day in His grace is reason enough to "rejoice and be glad." No matter what we face, we can still believe in God's goodness and love, as it is what carries us through the most difficult of seasons.

Even in tough times, let us look with confidence to each day and be grateful for the Lord's gifts, for He has given us breath for today. Let us celebrate our lives as a testament of God's faithfulness, knowing that even when we feel lost, we are found in God. Let us remember that happiness is not found in vindication, but in living with eternal trust in God's unwavering, immeasurable love.

*Madeline Briddell*

# PSALM 118 - THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

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**Saturday, April 11**

Life as gift...

One of the beautiful things in scripture is the startling relevance we find in these old, old words even today in our technology-driven, relationship-hungry, still keeping-up-with-the-Joneses, Facebook-polished, partisan world. Words uttered thousands of years ago speak into our lives in this moment, cutting through the 2020 window dressing and veneer. Longtime church member Jack Miller told me many years ago that every morning, just after getting up, he would walk out his back door and say to the world, “This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” This memory reminds me to take each day as gift, intentionally responding less to circumstance and more to the deep knowledge that I am a beloved child of God.

The psalms tug us from praise to lament and back again, two sides of the same coin. Just as Israel said to God, “God, there is no water, no food, too much of the same food, and God, when will we be home to our promised land?!” There are times when our desolation demands we tell God of our condition. But there also are times we despair and choose instead to turn to gratitude and praise. Things do not go as we plan, and we are well-planned people, yet practice can determine how we respond to circumstance.

Filled with marvel, gladness, thanksgiving, exaltation, and the sure knowledge of God’s steadfast love, the creator of Psalm 118 is ecstatic in her relationship with God, or, perhaps not. What if, in all circumstances, we first turn toward praise and gratitude? In facing our crosses, as well as peering into our empty tombs, what if we intentionally position ourselves toward a God who has lived our experience. Our Christ, our Emmanuel, is, after all, God with us.

*M. Courtenay Willcox*

# ENRICH YOUR EXPERIENCE OF LENT AND EASTER

Ash Wednesday <i>February 26</i>		
<b>5:30 p.m.</b> Family Service in the Chapel with Imposition of Ashes. The Rev. Rachel Pedersen preaching.	<b>5:30-7:30 p.m.</b> Wednesday Night Dinner served in Congregational Hall. Cost: \$8/adults, \$5/students and children. All welcome.	<b>7:30 p.m.</b> Service in the Chapel with Imposition of Ashes. The Rev. Franklyn C. Pottorff preaching.

**Lenten Evening Prayers** *Wednesdays, March 4, 11, 18, 25 and April 1*

Gather in the Chapel at 7:00 p.m. for a simple service of music, prayer, scripture and silence led by the pastors.

**Labyrinth**

Beginning on Ash Wednesday, the small Story Path labyrinth will be available for walking and quiet reflection in the Chapel weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

During Holy Week, the Story Path labyrinth may be walked in the Children’s Chapel on Monday, April 6, Tuesday, April 7 and Wednesday, April 8, from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. The Chartres labyrinth will be available in the gymnasium on Maundy Thursday, April 9, from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and on Good Friday, April 10, from 8:00 a.m. to noon with the option to walk the Stations of the Cross.

Printed prayers and meditations will be available at all times noted.

**Concerts with a Cause**

We are pleased to announce a new format for the 2019-2020 program year – Concerts with a Cause. We will be partnering with social service organizations and donating 50% of our proceeds from each concert to a partner organization. We hope you will join us and help support these organizations doing important work in our local community and beyond!

**Sunday, March 8, 4:00 p.m.**  
**Lenten Choir and Orchestra Concert**  
The BMPC Sanctuary Choir, Bryn Mawr Chamber Singers, soloists, and The Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia will present works of Francis Poulenc, Maurice Duruflé, Arthur Honegger, and Lili Boulanger.

*Partner organization – 12Plus*  
The mission of 12Plus is to increase educational equity by building school cultures that inspire academic achievement and empower students to succeed in education beyond 12th grade.

## Concerts with a Cause (continued)

***Sunday, March 22, 2:00 p.m.***

***Organ Recital: Vincent Dubois, Organist of Notre Dame Cathedral***

We are pleased to present this opportunity for you to hear the newest of the three Notre Dame organists, 38-year-old Vincent Dubois.

*Partner organization – Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris*

Benefit to support the 70 employees of Notre Dame Cathedral now without work after the catastrophic fire.

## Holy Week Services

***Palm Sunday, April 5***

- **8:00 a.m.** Worship with Communion, Chapel
- **9:45 a.m.** Children ages 2 - Kindergarten meet in classrooms and children grades 1 - 5 meet in Chapel for Palm Sunday Procession
- **10:00 a.m.** Worship with Children's Palm Procession, Sanctuary.
- **11:00 a.m.** All-Church Brunch, Congregational Hall
- No Wednesday Night Dinner this week (April 8).

***Maundy Thursday, April 9***

- **8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.** Labyrinth Walk, Gymnasium
- **5:30 p.m.** Family Service with Communion, Chapel
- **6:00 p.m.** Simple Supper in Congregational Hall. Free-will offering.
- **7:30 p.m.** Worship with Communion, Sanctuary. The Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick preaching.

***Good Friday, April 10***

- **8:00 a.m. - noon.** Labyrinth Walk, Gymnasium
- **12:00 noon.** Worship led by BMPC Youth, Chapel
- **7:30 p.m.** Tenebrae Service: The Sanctuary Choir presents Dale Wood's "Service of Darkness," Sanctuary. The Rev. Dr. Agnes W. Norfleet preaching.

***Easter Sunday, April 12***

- **6:30 a.m.** Sunrise Service on the Front Lawn. The Rev. Rachel Pedersen preaching.
- **7:30 a.m.** Continental Breakfast
- **8:00, 9:30, and 11:00 a.m.** Worship with Choir and Easter Brass in the Sanctuary. The Rev. Dr. Agnes W. Norfleet preaching.

**Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church**

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