

First Presbyterian Church Haddonfield

Lenten Devotional 2022



20 Kings Highway E, Haddonfield, NJ 08033 • www.haddonfieldpres.org • (856) 429-1960

DEVOTIONS

3/2 – ASH WEDNESDAY

Rita Brown, member of the Mission and Justice and Advocacy Committees
Isaiah 58:1-2 and Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21



“What have you given up for Lent?” is a frequently asked question most often followed by answers related to excess indulgences or bad habits to fulfill the current societal expectation or to feel good about oneself. Jesus tells us that if we seek recognition for our good deeds or store up our treasures then these earthly rewards are all we will ever get and not the heavenly rewards from God.

There might never be a better time to “give up” our fear of what we might lose if all human beings are treated with dignity, equality and justice and have proper health care, nutrition, clothing, shelter, education, safety from gun violence and relief from the effects of global warming. God tells Isaiah to “Shout out, do not hold back!” and “Use your voice like a trumpet!” to warn people of their sin and its consequences. Can you answer God’s call by letting go of your fears, educating yourself about what needs to be done and the history behind it and stepping out of your comfort zone to effect meaningful change for all God’s children?

Heavenly Father, as we begin our journey with Jesus to the cross, please help us let go of our fears so we may serve you and all your children with grateful hearts. Amen

Thursday, 3/3

Janet Shoemaker, Deacon
Acts 7:30-34

Moses hears the voice of the Lord coming from a burning bush in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai. The Lord tells Moses to go to Egypt and rescue his ancestors from mistreatment. Moses obeys the Lord. We, too, are asked by God to assist and rescue our friends and neighbors during difficult times. God will help us to help others in their time of need. Trust the Lord.

Dear God, I pray that you give me the strength and skills to help others in their time of need. Guide me as I look for a way to truly help those in need. Amen

Friday, 3/4

Sally O’Brien, Presbyterian Women

Psalms 91:1-2 – “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’”

How affirming these words are! We are faced with so many challenges: a pandemic, gun violence, climate change, a lack of a sense of trust and security, to name a few. It’s when things are tough that we are especially grateful that we worship a God who walks with us. God doesn’t promise us a world free of danger, but He does promise that we won’t face it alone. I hope that all of you will know that you never walk alone.

Lord, thank you for always being here. When I am afraid or lonely or overwhelmed, I know I can reach out and You will take my hand. Amen

Saturday, 3/5

Debra Nussbaum, Porch Bible Study cohost, Pastor Nominating Committee
Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16

Who has not dealt with worry or with fear? We are all sons or daughters, many of us are parents, aunts or uncles, some of us are teachers or nurses or have a career that puts others in our care. And even though God tells us in the Scriptures not to worry, we worry. Hopefully, we also pray and trust in the Lord.

Passages like Psalm 91:2, that say, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust,” assure us that we do not take this journey on earth alone. God is with us every step. We do not have immunity against illness, emotional hurting or a variety of harms. What we have is God with us and the gift of hope in God throughout our lives.

When God tells us not to fear or when Scripture reminds us that God is our refuge, it gives us courage.



Dear Lord, I know that you are always with us and that you love us and never turn away from us. Please help us to grow in faith and in courage. In Jesus’s name. Amen

3/6 – First Sunday of Lent

Caroline Yount, Elder, Mission and Outreach Committee chair
Luke 4:1-13

This verse finds Jesus after his baptism, full of the Holy Spirit and led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where the Scripture tells us he was tempted by the devil for 40 days. Jesus ate nothing for those 40 days and was understandably famished when they were over. The devil taunts and tests him – dangling temptations ranging from bread to absolute power over all the kingdoms of the world – but Jesus skillfully answers and resists the devil, proving himself to be the faithful Son of God. The devil rarely appears so directly in the Bible, let alone for an extended conversation, and even less directly in our lives, but how many choices do we make over the course of a day, some seemingly without thought, from mundane shortcuts where expedience wins out over moral excellence, to more critical lapses in kindness and selflessness that imperil our core values. Loving others, even when we disagree; speaking out when confronted with injustice; and making decisions based on a desire to do good for the world, not just fulfill our immediate needs and wants, are ways we can prove ourselves to be faithful followers of God.

Dear God, help us to be mindful of your great love each day and show that love to others in all that we say and do. Help us to work for justice and peace and sustain and strengthen us as we strive to follow the example of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

REFLECTIONS

Monday, 3/7

Rebecca Bryan, Elder, Justice and Advocacy Committee chair

1 John 2:4-6 (NRSV) – “Whoever says, ‘I have come to know him,’ but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, ‘I abide in him,’ ought to walk just as he walked.”

How do you know that the decisions you make in 2022 align with Jesus’s 2000-year-old commandments? Where in your body do you feel it when you are walking in his footsteps? I’m not talking about volunteering efforts, I’m thinking about decisions made in relationships, with work projects, even while shopping – in the mundane settings of daily life. Neuroscience shows us that most of the communication between body and mind goes up – from body to mind – through our vagus nerve (author Resmaa Menakem calls it our “soul nerve”). Culture tells us to ignore our bodily messages, even celebrates us for doing so. But Jesus is countercultural! And so, here’s an invitation: listen to your body. Develop a sense of deep, incarnate knowing, get in touch with that spark of the divine in you, then trust God enough to listen to it! You’ll find yourself choosing the path of love over the path of fear, and you will be able to say honestly, “I abide in him.”

God of love, open us to the depth of your Spirit so that we may abide in Christ. Amen

Tuesday, 3/8

Debra Nussbaum

Zechariah 3:1-5 – “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?’ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ And to him he said, ‘Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.’ And I said, ‘Let them put a clean turban on his head.’ So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord was standing by.”

Zechariah is one of the last books in the Old Testament and was probably written in 520 B.C. While I don’t find the book that easy to understand, I do hear the message from this prophet loud and clear. The people were in captivity in Babylon. Cyrus allowed people to rebuild the temple when they returned to Jerusalem. The role of Zechariah, according to my NIV Quest Study Bible was to encourage those who feel discouraged. God says, return to me and I will return to you. These passages tell us that even if at times we fall away or doubt, God is always there to walk with us. In Bible study, many of us have shared times when we didn’t go to church or some of us grew up unchurched. But God is there. He is consistent and never gives up on us. Zechariah did not want his people to be discouraged, but instead to be strengthened by faith in the Lord.

Lord, even in difficult times and times of questioning, we know you are there. Please be with us each day in our walk of faith and let us follow the example of the prophets and encourage others. In His Name. Amen

Wednesday, 3/9

Rachel Davis, Elder and member of Justice and Advocacy and Christian Education Committees.
Job 1:1-22

Job was a man who enjoyed many blessings. The writer provides a careful accounting in verses 1-3 to drive home the point that Job was living a life of power and privilege. Yet Job was a righteous man of great faith to the point that he made regular burnt offerings just in case any of his children had sinned. Satan assumed that Job only followed God's commands in order to continue to prosper. But God had faith in Job even as He allowed Satan to put into play events that prove the old saying that "sometimes bad things happen to good people." In spite of losing everything, Job remained righteous, never complaining or blaming God for all he had lost, but rather blessing God.

Loving and faithful God, when life isn't fair, I pray that, like Job, I will remain your faithful servant. Give me the courage to follow Jesus's example and work for justice in an unjust world. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen

Thursday, 3/10

Margot Dark, Elder, Communications Committee chair.
Psalms 27

David wrote this psalm as a statement of trust. Trust in the Lord. A statement of faith. Trust and faith go hand in hand. Trusting that it will turn out is why we call it faith. When faced with adversity it is easy to retreat and give up, or to become hardened to the world. With trust you can learn and become a better person. The final verse "wait for the Lord, be strong let your heart take courage and wait for the Lord" in times when we may feel no hope, when we feel there is no way out, or no end of the dark tunnel we are in, this is something we need to remember. Have courage and wait for the Lord.

Lord, please help us to trust in you always, even in the darkest moments. Please be with those who need your light and help them out of their dark times. Only you know all of those who are suffering right now; please help them to trust in you always. Amen

Friday, 3/11

Anne Vial, Office Administrator, Moore Bells

Genesis 14:22-23 – "But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have sworn to the Lord, God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you might not say, "I have made Abram rich."'"

Philippians 3:19-20 – "Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Misdirected loyalties, distracted attention, navel gazing. Abram (soon to make the covenant that changes his name to Abraham) refuses the spoils of war to which he is entitled both for his own clarity and to be clear with the King of Sodom – Abram will not be beholden to him. Paul writes about those who would lose Abram's focus and be swayed by material comfort: "Their end is destruction." When my focus is wrapped up in my own comforts – when my focus is wrapped up in my own discomforts –

my eyes are no longer on the prize. I have left the mission to serve in this world and made a god of my belly. These verses are not so subtle nudges to keep God's aims in mind and in focus.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence (Psalm 27:11-12).

Saturday, 3/12

Tony and Jill Mascena, Cohosts Porch Study Group, PB&J sandwich makers (St. Wilfrid's)

David talked about a road that wouldn't be rocky and cause us to fall...and how if we don't trust that God knows what we need when we need it, we will fall!

We all experience happy and depressed moods – especially in Pandemic times when we aren't with other people as much as we used to be. Discouragement WILL come – do we have the spirit and skill to meet it?

“Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord” (Psalm 27:14).

If we concentrate on God rather than our difficulties, our difficulties shrink to actual size, and we can handle them. Sometimes they aren't even difficulties anymore

How big is your GOD?

Dear God, Thank You for being in our lives even when we can't see You. When we can't see You – help us remember we are the ones who moved so we couldn't see You anymore! Thank You for Your patience and for being there and keeping us from falling. Thank You for continuing to love us “anyway.” Amen

3/13 – Second Sunday in Lent

Rev. Dr. Douglas D. Gerds, Transitional Senior Pastor

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

The biblical picture of God and Abram's relationship is fairly straightforward:

God speaks and Abram listens.

God promises and Abram believes.

God commands and Abram obeys.

There comes a point though when Abram finally says, “Wait a minute — I have a question!”

Abram, the great model of faithfulness, is also a person who wants to know how God is going to fulfill God's promises! Abram looks at his life and says, “It's unclear to me, God, how you are going to work things out. There are some pretty big obstacles in the way. I'd like to have just a little more information.”

We know the story of Abram (aka Abraham) and Sarai (Sarah). They up and moved when God said “go” and dealt with all kinds of setbacks and problems — all the while trusting God's leading. They were courageous, obedient, humble, and faithful.

And — they had questions — and, truth be told, a few complaints!

Can a person who questions and complains also be a model of faith?

How often when we are faced with the anxiety of doubt and uncertainty, when frustrated and disappointed do we think of it as a “crisis of faith?”

Blind obedience is not faith. Questioning and pondering and wondering and challenging — those are components of faith. Our questions reveal that we take seriously God’s activity in our lives and the world. Engaging with that which we don’t understand or appreciate is an act of respect and integrity.

Like Abram, we can question God as part of our faithfulness and trust. We also live expectantly that God’s promises of life, hope, and future are extended to us in Jesus Christ, who calls us to the next step and follow him.

Holy and gracious God — we can’t always understand your ways or your confidence in us — but we trust in your leading and we depend on your gracious acceptance of our doubt and questions. Give us courage and wisdom and openness to your leading that we might follow in the ways of Christ our Lord. Amen

Monday, 3/14

Peter Leibensperger, Minister of Music

Exodus 33:1-6

The Bible is filled with descriptive names for God that inform our perspective of God, but occasionally those descriptions seem to come into conflict. Here in Exodus 33, we read of a God who loves his people so much that God has rescued them from slavery in Egypt and is about to deliver the promised land to them by sending an angel into battle before them. And yet, God warns that God may not go into Canaan with the Israelites, because God might destroy them because they are stubborn and wayward and have turned from God at nearly every step of the way. We always remember that God is a merciful God, but do we also remember that God is a God of justice?

Holy God, may we know your love and your mercy but never forget that you are wild and untamable. We ask you to guide us to your promised land in love, but may we reach your promise through obedience, in the everyday struggle for justice. Amen

Tuesday, 3/15

Kae Fretz, Elder, Presbyterian Women, St. Wilfrid’s

Psalm 105:1-45

In Psalm 105 the Jews (and we) are asked to sing God’s praises for their (our) myriad blessings, for his magnificent creation, for life. It is followed by a brief history of the covenant God made, their meanderings, God’s many rescues of them, their time in Egypt and God’s fulfillment of his promises.

Lord God, thank you for our beautiful productive world, for the love in our lives, for giving us more than we deserve, for the help that comes along often before we know we need it and for hearing our prayers and pleas. May we remember to be grateful and to thank you every day. Amen

Wednesday, 3/16

Carol H. Carty, Stephen Leader, Prison Ministry, Presbyterian Women
Psalm 105

The Psalms seem to offer a way to express feelings, especially Psalm 105. Two of these feelings are joy and gratitude for what God has done in the lives of the early Hebrews and for us today. How can these feelings be expressed? Let our hearts and voices shout hallelujah! Be bold as we sing songs of praise and thankfulness to our Lord.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us voices to sing praises to you. Help us to sing boldly with joy and thankfulness. Amen

Thursday, 3/17

Paul Urian, Elder, St. Wilfrid's, Justice and Advocacy Committee
Psalm 63

In the early church, this Psalm was prescribed for daily public prayer. It is a confession of a longing for God and the security God's presence provides. It uses imagery to connect "the night of danger" that we all feel at times to the "morning of salvation" when God's presence is felt in all those we encounter and in fact in all living things.

Dear Lord, I humbly come before you to thank you that I get to rest comfortably under the shelter of Your wings in the widely accessible place of your presence. Amen

Friday, 3/18

Rev. Nikki Perrine Passante, Associate Pastor
Revelation 3:1-6

With all of the glaring images and terror on the surface of the Revelation of St. John, we can miss the main message of this vision – brought home sharply in the letter to the church in Sardis. Said twice in these verses and in the briefest of terms, "Wake up." You see the opposite of love isn't hate – it's apathy. What I read is that evil is not the true culprit, it is our ignoring of it. May the letter to Sardis serve as a reminder to pay attention and be alert to what is going on around us, that we would not miss God's call to action on any given day!

**May we not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds!
(Romans 12:2)**

REFLECTIONS

Saturday, 3/19

Gabrielle Heimerling, Director of Youth and Family Ministry

Luke 6:43-45 – A Tree and Its Fruit

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.”

Our words are the fruit that our hearts produce. When we really listen to our own words, what do we hear? Are we speaking words of love, or are we speaking words of pain? The words that we use towards ourselves and others reveal the nature of our hearts. And like fruit trees, hearts that are not producing good words can be cultivated, nurtured, and pruned to produce good fruit, words rooted in love.

Dear God, please give us the strength and patience to really listen to our words. Please grant us patience and wisdom to nurture our hearts to produce words of love for ourselves and others. Amen

3/20 – Third Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:6-9 – The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

“Then he told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, “See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?” He replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”’”



Dear God of Second Chances, help me to be patient long enough for manure to do its work and strong enough to cut away that which bears no fruit. Amen

Monday, 3/21

Rebecca Bryan

Romans 2:9-11 (The Message) – “If you go against the grain, you get splinters, regardless of which neighborhood you’re from, what your parents taught you, what schools you attended. But if you embrace the way God does things, there are wonderful payoffs, again without regard to where you are from or how you were brought up. Being a Jew won’t give you an automatic stamp of approval. God pays no attention to what others say (or what you think) about you. He makes up his own mind.”

Maya Angelou said, “Just do right. Right may not be expedient, it may not be profitable, but it will satisfy your soul.” Walking in Jesus’s footsteps can get you in trouble, and it can be a lonely road at times. It certainly doesn’t help one’s social status! And yet, it is soul-satisfying. Spearheading our congregation’s conversations on race has felt this way to me. Growing up in Haddonfield taught me that talking about race was distasteful, even rude, and in the 21st-century, race conversations have donned political overtones. Yet my Black and Brown friends speak of race like they speak about the weather – because they have no choice. In a society built on white, colonial values interactions with others *must* be navigated through the lens of race. When I check in with my soul, I know that I must speak of race too, however awkwardly, however imperfectly, if I am to honor the richness of these

friendships. Black history is American history, not just the focus of history in February! Just like our own transgenerational family histories, America's history is messy, and God already knows this. The path to healing is acknowledging the messiness and atoning through equitable efforts. No doubt, there will be splinters along the way, but hopefully those will be outweighed by soul satisfaction.

Dear Lord, may I do right in the face of messy and painful pasts. Help me to learn truth and then to speak it. Amen

Tuesday, 3/22

Rachel Davis

Psalm 39

Could you go a full 24 hours without complaining once? In spite of the relative comfort and privilege that most of us are able to enjoy every day, we somehow find plenty that doesn't live up to our expectations. In Psalm 39 David reminds us that life is too short to spend time thinking and speaking about anything other than God's blessings.

Loving God from whom all blessings flow, help me to resist the urge to complain today. Rather, fill my heart with gratitude for all that I have. In the name of the greatest blessing of all, Your Son Jesus Christ, Amen

Wednesday, 3/23

Rebeca Silva de Foote, Pastor Nominating Committee



Luke 13:18-21 – (KJV) “Then said he, ‘Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.’ And again he said, ‘Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.’”

This is the parable of the mustard seed. Mustard seeds are very, very small. Despite its size this seed has the ability to grow into a huge plant. Clearly this is a story about growth. Jesus tells us here that although the Kingdom of God has humble and small beginnings, it will grow and spread across the world to an unlimited number of people. You can also apply this parable to your own spiritual journey. As you grow in your faith, you will exude this energy to others around you and by doing so will spread the good word. It is a reminder of the importance of putting our trust in Jesus, just like putting a tiny seed in the ground. When we do that, the Holy Spirit comes alive within each of us and although you cannot see this growth from the outside, it is very much alive, breathing and growing inside of the believer. One way I personally grow in my faith is to pray.

Prayer to grow and strengthen my faith: Lord hear my prayer. You say that they are blessed who have not seen and yet believe. Even though you are close to me and have taken root in my heart, I sometimes doubt your presence and refuse to believe unless I touch and see. Strengthen my faith so I may know that you are with me always as the way, the truth, and the life. Show me the path you wish me to take. Use me as a tiny seed in this great big world to share your love with everyone. Amen

Thursday, 3/24

Karen Dante, Deacon, Chancel Choir, COVID Response Team
2 Corinthians 4:16, 5:5

As our earthly bodies (tents) age and die, our souls are being constantly rejuvenated by our relationship to God. We suffer on earth in various ways, but these “light afflictions” are minor and short-lived compared to the glory of eternity with God in his Heavenly Kingdom. We should be comforted and rejoice in the knowledge that He is preparing this new home for us.

Heavenly Father, we so often focus on our superficial appearances, on the states of our aging physical bodies, and on our own suffering, which can at times seem overwhelming. We realize that our suffering is only temporary, and that it pales in comparison to the great sacrifice You made when You gave Your only Son to save the world. Help us to shed the burden of our earthly tents and to nurture our inner relationship with You, so that we will one day be able to know the glory of eternal life. In Jesus’s name we pray, Amen

Friday, 3/25

Bob and Janet Lehman, Justice and Advocacy and Property Committees, Chancel Choir
Psalm 32

In times of introspection, Psalm 32 encourages us to curl up on God’s lap, wherever we find it: in nature or music or a sanctuary. Confess the innermost thoughts that cause us pain or regret. Pray with and to Him; He will show the path forward, freeing us to let go, be thankful, and “shout for joy.”

God, thank You for letting us come to you, to trust You with our prayers of concern and regret. May we accept Your forgiveness and look forward in our lives with faith and comfort. Amen

Saturday, 3/26

Judy Grantham, Presbyterian Women Moderator

Luke 15:10 – “Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

In the parables of the lost things told by Luke (15:1-10) Jesus evokes an image of God who not only actively seeks out those who are “lost” but rejoices when they are found. Those who have been lost experience more than repentance. They have a change of mind and purpose – a shift in how to perceive and respond to life. God finds us and transforms us. And there is great rejoicing.

Lent is the season for personal reflection in which we may recognize that we have indeed been found. We realize that such grace is at the cost of Jesus dying on a cross. We stand before that cross, sinners in need of a Savior. And God’s abundant grace is there.

Loving Lord, you find me when I am lost and hold me close to your heart. I rejoice in your steadfast love and mercy. Amen

*“Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.” Psalm 32:11*

3/27 – Fourth Sunday in Lent

Doug Gerdtz

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

The very familiar story of The Prodigal Son in which the younger son personifies what appears to be a universal human perception that worse than death is the feeling of being lost, especially when that condition has been brought on by one's own lust, greed, or arrogance.

Grace lies at the heart of this parable — scandalous grace, grace that defies all earthly rules and conventions.

Reflecting on the older son's reaction is also instructive for us in the church and we perhaps recognize our own complicit sin — sin of pride or jealousy or anger or self-righteousness. When we should be rejoicing, our own sin mars redemption.

For a moment, focus on verse 17 and the phrase “when he came to himself” — a wonderful way of saying that when the younger son was at his lowest point, he realized the profound discontinuity between who he had become and who he truly was. Like the rest of us, he didn't have it all figured out, but he knew that something was not the way it should be!

The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote the following and it's offered to us as a prayer:

I have a dream, God says. Please help to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing. I have a dream that swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, that all children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God's family, my family. Amen!

Monday, 3/28

Anne Vial

Leviticus 23:26-41

These verses set out the ritual day of atonement and the harvest festival of booths. Jesus's healing practice made an exception to the Jewish rules about the sabbath, and his sacrifice took away the need to make burnt offerings. But the solemnity with which God demands atonement and sacrifice, rest and thanksgiving remains.

Dear God, may our journey through Lent be a mindful one. Let the rituals of the season be full of meaning and of the spirit. Amen

REFLECTIONS

Tuesday, 3/29

Kae Fretz

Revelation 9 and 10 suggest to me that we who accept Jesus's invitation to the communion table are blessed, but we must remember to worship God humbly. We are servants to others as Jesus served us.

Dear Lord, remember us with all our failings and good intentions. Let us serve others trying to mirror your humility in serving us. Amen

Wednesday, 3/30

Tina Edmonston, Deacon, Sunday School teacher

Luke 9:10-17

Jesus attracted a crowd of 5000, told them about the kingdom of God, and healed them. Everybody was getting a little tired and maybe the disciples were hoping to get some precious time alone with Jesus. Just the Rabbi and his inner circle. But rather than dismissing the crowd, he charged his disciples: "You feed them," even though they already knew that there were only 5 loaves of bread and two fish. And miraculously the disciples were able to do it, following his instructions. Jesus broke the bread, and gave thanks, as he had done so many times before and as he would do so many more times after that. There was enough for everybody, everybody was satisfied, and there was plenty more.

Dear Lord, sometimes we are just tired and want some rest, and sometimes we want the special treatment and to be a member of the inner circle. But you ask us to keep doing more and to make sure everyone is included. Remind us that you have unlimited nourishment for all who want to listen and who need to be fed, and that you can make things happen that seem impossible. Be patient with our hesitation and doubts. Thank you for the abundance of your love and for letting your son Jesus die to save us. Amen

Thursday, 3/31

Anne Vial

Psalm 126

We're halfway through the church's most somber season, but today's psalm reminds us that there are reasons to fill our mouths with laughter and our tongues with joy. Having a good sense of humor is like a superpower. It's a kind of Teflon to life's sticky challenges and disappointments. Isaiah probably didn't have Teflon in mind, but he, too, reminds us of an invincibility God's protection provides: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you" (Isaiah 43:2). It's ridiculous. Laughable even. Indeed!

Dear God, let our hearts be full of joy and our mouths full of laughter; and let that be a shield that allows us to walk through the darkest of days. Amen

Friday, 4/1

Psalm 126

- ¹ When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
² Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them."
³ The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

O Lord of great things, thank you. Lord of laughter and joy, thank you. Amen

Saturday, 4/2

Psalm 126

- ⁴ Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.
⁵ May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
⁶ Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

Dear God, help me trust that tears will eventually be replaced by joy and that seeds do yield sheaves...in your time. Amen

4/3 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

Nancy Ruth Wainwright

Isaiah 43: 18-21 (NIV) – "Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself, that they may proclaim my praise."

More than 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah foretold his coming. Jesus is God's "new thing," the living water, the Messiah. In this passage we are told to forget the former things and not to dwell on the past; all things will be new. Praise God for the newness, for the water, for the refreshment!



What caught my nature-lover's eye was verse 20: "Wild animals honor me, the jackals and owls...." Other versions listed "jackals and ostriches," "coyotes and buzzards," and "dragons and owls." My imagination soared with all these animals honoring God. The Message states, "Wild animals will say, 'Thank you!'" Can you picture it?

Our God, who brings forth streams in the desert, help us to leave the past behind and do a new thing with You. In chorus with the animals, we say, "Thank you!" today, and every day. Amen

Monday, 4/4

Psalm 20

⁶ Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with mighty victories by his right hand.

⁷ Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses,
but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God.

⁸ They will collapse and fall,
but we shall rise and stand upright.

Give victory to the king, O Lord; answer us when we call (verse 9). Amen

Tuesday, 4/5

Judges 9:7-15

These verses tell a funny little parable that results in bramble coming to reign over the trees:

And the bramble said to the trees,
'If in good faith you are anointing me king over you,
then come and take refuge in my shade;
but if not, let fire come out of the bramble
and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'

The humble bramble is willing to take on the sovereign role, but only if the trees are serious about their offer. Smart plant.



Dear God, keep me cautious about what the world has to offer but also confident enough to tackle the most daunting of calls. Amen

Wednesday, 4/6

Nikki Passante

Luke 18:34 – “But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”

Jesus says this a different way in John 16: 12 – “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” This reminds me that spiritual truths do not come easily and rarely boldly, and often I’m left with more questions than answers. Divine Revelation is hard to handle, so instead God will unveil a process. This is annoying. What I know is that I’ll never graduate from the spiritual life. It’s less a ladder to success and more like an onion – as the layers begin to peel off, we start to realize that more is always being revealed. Feeling impatient? Wondering if your prayers are going to be answered? Keep praying. Trust. Wait. Don’t quit five minutes before the miracle. More is always being revealed.

Help me to set aside everything I think I know about you God, myself, and others, so that I can have a new experience of you God, myself, and others. Amen

Thursday, 4/7

Rachel Davis

Hebrews 2:1-9

In Hebrews 2:1-9 we receive two important reminders. First, we need to listen to the truths we are taught in the Bible. Not only must we accept these truths, but we must live according to Jesus’s teaching (verses 1-3). Additionally, we are reminded that God has assigned spiritual gifts to each of us (verse 4). Through prayer and meditation we can discern our spiritual gifts. By following the example of the human Christ, we will see how to live out our Christian values. Likewise by the risen Christ we are reminded of God’s grace.

Loving and gracious God, we pray that You will give us the courage and faith to put our spiritual gifts into action in order that Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In the name of the greatest teacher and gift, Your son Jesus Christ. Amen

Friday, 4/8

Isaiah 54:9-10

⁹This is like the days of Noah to me:
Just as I swore that the waters of Noah
would never again go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you
and will not rebuke you.

¹⁰For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

Dear God, though I constantly disappoint, you remain steadfast. Help me in my striving to do the right thing. Forgive me for testing the limits of your limitless love. Amen

Saturday, 4/9

Psalm 31

⁹ Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.

¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.

Dear God, we bring you our pain, our distress. Thank you that in the midst of it we feel you as well. “You are my God. My times are in your hand” (verses 14-15). Amen

4/10 – Palm Sunday

Nikki Passante

Luke 19:28-40 – “The Lord needs it” (verses 31, 34).

As we begin the walk to the cross with Jesus this week, let us contemplate together the question: “What does the Lord need from me?” Perhaps a more relevant question to consider would be “What do I need from the Lord?”

Ask him for **that** in prayer.

Monday, 4/11

Rebecca Bryan

Hebrews 9:11-15 (The Message) – “But when the Messiah arrived, high priest of the superior things of this new covenant, he bypassed the old tent and its trappings in this created world and went straight into heaven’s “tent” – the true Holy Place – once and for all. He also bypassed the sacrifices consisting of goat and calf blood, instead using his own blood as the price to set us free once and for all. If that animal blood and the other rituals of purification were effective in cleaning up certain matters of our religion and behavior, think how much more the blood of Christ cleans up our whole lives, inside and out. Through the Spirit, Christ offered himself as an unblemished sacrifice, freeing us from all those dead-end efforts to make ourselves respectable, so that we can live all out for God.”

What makes us respectable in our community? The way we dress, the way we act, where we work, where we live? I knew a guy once who, by all these measures and more, was well-respected in his community. A successful lawyer in Washington, D.C., he lived in a beautiful home, had a loving family, and took enviable vacations. Yet he felt moments of emptiness that increased in length and frequency as he entered middle age. His life was changed, and the emptiness filled, when he heard Billy Graham preach. He and his wife dedicated their lives to the work of their congregation, which translated to them living in a peace that passed all understanding in their later years, when I met them. I think about this now and again when I need to make a life decision. And I think about this when I hear Doug ask us what our church is known by, what difference do we make? What does heaven’s “tent” – the true Holy Place – look like for us? Come Holy Spirit come and show us the way.

Come Holy Spirit come and show us the way. Amen

Tuesday, 4/12

Anne Vial

I Corinthians 1:18-31

I appreciate Paul's idea that foolishness can be a virtue; it gets us out of stodgy ruts and allows for innovation and subversion of systems crying out to be subverted. But I struggle with the way Paul throws away human wisdom and specifically the wisdom of Greeks and Jews. I like the continual study and discernment required in the Reform tradition, and the Greeks and Jews offer much in the way of human understanding. So today, I am reminded of two things. One is that scripture sometimes reflects the agenda of a specific writer or historical circumstance, and it's ok to say "Huh?" as I look for understanding. The second is that God's wisdom is its own thing and God will continually subvert our expectations. God chooses what is foolish, weak, and despised "so that no one might boast in the presence of God." Discerning is one thing; being a know-it-all gets in the way of the expansiveness and unexpectedness of God. That part I think Paul gets right.

Dear God, open my eyes to all I do not know. Let me be uncertain enough to change my mind, to learn new things, to be open to the foolishness of grace. Amen

Wednesday, 4/13

Jill and Tony Mascena

Hebrews 12:1-3

The only part of our lives we can control is our reactions to what life is giving us – we can react with love or hate or ignore...our choice

God gives us different passions so that what He wants done in the world will get done.

"Let us run with patience the particular race God has set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

If we can be quiet and listen – we will realize what He asks us to do whether it's feeding the hungry or loving people anyway by looking for the positives in them or being quiet and listening to what the other person is saying.

Dear God, Thank You for being in our lives even when we let life get in the way of our hearing You. Help us to be quiet and to listen. When we look – You are always there for us. Thank You for all the nudges to remind us. Thank You for loving us and showing us what we can do to help others come to know You. Amen

REFLECTIONS

4/14 – Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17



“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

May we be so blessed. Amen

4/15 GOOD FRIDAY

Virginia Ritchie, Deacon, Presbyterian Women

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 – The Suffering Servant

Might Isaiah be setting forth in this passage the model of the suffering servant for the Israelites to enable them to serve God in that time and place? If so, they didn’t seem to understand that. From our perspective, however, as New Testament Christians we look at the suffering servant and see that that role played out in Jesus’s life and death. During his time on earth Jesus sought to love and serve people. His ultimate sacrifice, which we observe today, provided healing, hope and reconciliation for all who will accept it. As we again observe Good Friday and celebrate his Resurrection we need to reflect on his life and focus on how he brings wholeness to our lives. We also need to remember that if we choose to follow Jesus, we, too, are called to act according to the model of the suffering servant. We are called to love God and each other and to work for justice and peace even at risk of suffering and pain, not through bloodshed and violence or power and might but in sacrificial service. How are we measuring up? A dear friend of mine drew the picture clearly for me when she asked, “If you were on trial for being a Christian would there be enough evidence for a conviction?”

Dear God, fill our hearts with a passion for following in Jesus’s way as we seek to make a difference in this world. Amen

Saturday, 4/16

Psalm 31:1-2

¹ In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.

² Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.



Dear God, with the pain of yesterday in my heart, I reach out for refuge. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen

REFLECTIONS

4/17 EASTER

Doug Gerdtz

Acts 10:34-43

I was leading a Bible study on Acts many years ago, using the same Kerygma book that a group at FPCH is currently using, and a long-term, faithful, and engaged member said when we came upon these verses in the tenth chapter, “I never knew this was in here!” Obviously her declaration made an impression as I vividly remember it 25 years later! I loved that a lifelong student of the Bible could discover something new — and not just new — but surprising and even transforming!

This is a show-stopper statement and perhaps the most concise statement of the Gospel: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality.” The words were spoken by the rock upon which the church was founded, Peter himself! Peter — an ambitious and fervent promoter of the teachings of Jesus — figured it out and not a moment too soon!

Of course God shows no partiality — would we ever think that God had favorites among us?

Sure — if we’re honest — sure we do! God’s favorites? Well, for starters, us! Good, church-going Christians who pledge and pray and practice what’s preached. Pass the plate and let’s go home!

Human beings have self-stratified since the beginning of time. Hierarchy, pecking order, ins and outs — it’s natural for us. Maybe it’s natural for us, but not for God and not at all what God had in mind.

The message for Easter is that Jesus’s death and resurrection is Good News for all people and living that reality is perhaps our greatest challenge and gift — for if God truly does show no partiality, if God truly loves all people, then that guarantees our inclusion as well.

Awaken us this Easter Sunday with renewed vision of your world — of a post-post-resurrection world in which we are called to love one another as siblings in Christ with no hint of hierarchy or judgment or qualification. We give thanks that in loving all of creation and its creatures, you include us in that gracious love. Amen



David Jones, “The Resurrection” 1924

Devotional Contributors

Rita Brown
Rebecca Bryan
Carol Carty
Karen Dante
Margot Dark
Rachel Davis
Tina Edmonston
Kae Fretz
Doug Gerdts
Judy Grantham
Gabrielle Heimerling
Peter Leibensperger

Bob and Janet Lehman
Tony and Jill Mascena
Debra Nussbaum
Sally O'Brien
Nikki Passante
Virginia Ritchie
Janet Shoemaker
Rebeca Silva De Foote
Paul Urian
Anne Vial
Nancy Ruth Wainwright
Caroline Yount

Many thanks to the contributors who have provided thoughtful advice, justice-seeking prodding, and welcome solace for the contemplative weeks of Lent in these pages. This is a community that cares deeply about each other, its place in the world, and its relationship to God. There is nothing fancy here – just discernment and love, qualities that in the best of times define First Presbyterian Church of Haddonfield. We are blessed. Anne Vial, editor

Lent and Holy Week at First Presbyterian

Ash Wednesday – March 2

Drive-through Imposition of Ashes 12:45-1:45 p.m.
(Enter driveway by the playground)

Ash Wednesday Worship streamed online starting at 11 a.m.: www.haddonfieldpres.org/watchlive

April 9

Easter Egg hunt at 11 a.m. on the playground (Confirm time close to date)

Palm Sunday – April 10

Worship at 10 a.m. in person and live streamed: www.haddonfieldpres.org/watchlive

Maundy Thursday – April 14

Worship at 7:30 p.m. with Communion
In person and live streamed: www.haddonfieldpres.org/watchlive

Good Friday – April 15

Ecumenical Worship – The Seven Last Words of Christ from 12-3 p.m.
Haddonfield United Methodist Church, 29 Warwick Rd. Haddonfield

Easter – April 17

Worship at 10 a.m. in person and live streamed: www.haddonfieldpres.org/watchlive