Dear People and Friends of ECA,

Here is our third annual book of Lenten meditations—a meditation for every day of Lent. Here are the ruminations of members and friends of this community, folks you may see every Sunday and folks you only see sometimes. It is a gift from some of us to all of us, the opportunity to hear the hearts of people you might not know. What a celebration of our community in Christ, a tangible expression of being the church to one another. I invite you to take this on as a discipline for your Lenten practice this year, as an aid to your private prayer and an impetus to engage with scripture every day. And I invite you to hear each other’s voices as well; use this opportunity to know one another more deeply. Real community means sharing what is true with one another. I hope that truth shines forth in these pages for you.

Many thanks to all its contributors, to Rev. Canon Linda Taylor who encouraged its publishing, to Ann Mayers for editing it, and special thanks to Kimberly and Todd Axtell for formatting and printing this booklet.

God bless you during this holy Lent and always.

Mary McPherson, Sr. Warden
Wednesday February 18

Jonah
The book of Jonah, I think, is about God’s loving us. God shows us that love by giving us work to do, by being innovative in getting us to the job, by giving us words to be successful, by being exceptionally kind to us when we are troubled, by being patient with us when we feel used and unnecessary, by teaching us the love of a whole people, and by letting us figure out from there that each one of us is loved with an encompassing love and a gentle humor that is far greater than we had ever imagined.

Luke 18:9-14
This story in Luke is another of Jesus’s stories to get us thinking and wondering about what God’s love and forgiveness really are. Jesus speaks about two different approaches to God, about two different prayer conversations with God: one walled round, secure, closed in by righteousness and rules kept; and one torn open by life, exposed and raw with the wrenching emptiness and longing of one who is even afraid to approach God. Jesus knows about both those kinds of prayers.
Psalm 32
“When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to thee. I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.”

Thursday, February 19

The following are my thoughts on the scripture I (He) chose:

**Deut. 7:6–11** God reminds the Hebrews they are not great in numbers but great in faith, and God is faithful to them as long as they obey the laws and commandments he set for them to follow.

**Titus 1:1–16** Paul writes to Titus to help him see how to organize the church in Crete. He sets out characteristics that must be possessed by those (elders) who will lead the church in Crete, town by town, since there are many diverse false leaders who are corrupt. He warns that there are many false prophets or leaders who do so to promote their own agenda and profit.

**John 1:29–34** The day before, John the Baptist had been questioned by the Pharisees about his motives and who he was in relation to the Messiah he foresees. Then, John the Baptist witnessed that he recognized Jesus even though he had never met him. He just “knows” because he saw the Holy Spirit rest on his head as a dove when he baptized him with water. He deflects attention to Jesus from himself.
George Romer

Psalm 37 The psalmist describes the distinctions between virtuous people and the wicked. The virtuous, faithful people are to keep to their path and not lust for the riches or possessions of the wicked since the worldly things they have will not last. They and their “things” are but distractions. The virtuous are exhorted to look to lasting values, doing good works, and God will reward them.

Themes: Be reminded constantly that God is with you in the flesh and in the spirit. Follow the tradition of law and commandments passed down from generation to generation. Be not distracted by the “bling” from doing what is right to and among your neighbors and relatives. Your reward is relationship to God if you only keep your attention on the important people and values.

I pray that the above thoughts provide some spark of insight beyond the words written here.

Psalm 37, Deuteronomy 7:6-11, Titus 1:1-16, John 1:29-34
Friday, February 20

John 1:39 Jesus simply said to them, “Come and see.”

What a very simple statement to call others to Christ. “Just come and see.” Sometimes we make it so difficult. We worry about what to say or how to say it. We worry that we cannot express well what Jesus means to us or how we may have changed over time just knowing Him. We get tongue tied around the word “evangelize.” We bring fear into the simple act of being hospitable and inviting others to “come and see.”

Lots of exciting and wonderful things happen at ECA. Deep and caring friendships are made over time with others and with Jesus through fellowship, worship experiences, working together, sharing fun, laughter, and even tears. Words aren’t really needed. The experiences will speak for themselves.

This Lent, why not extend a warm invitation to “come and see”? 
Susie Ferguson

Psalms 95, 31, 35; Deut. 7:12-16; Titus 1:2-15; John 1:35-42
Saturday, February 21

John 1: 46 Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

One of our characteristics as humans is to categorize. We group things in order to make them easier to manage. We generalize in order to understand. But sometimes this leads to misunderstanding. Our elder daughter was just acquiring language and learning the names of animals. We had a cat, so she learned that four legged creatures with fur and tails were kitties. We passed a field with a horse in it, and she pointed and announced it was a kitty.

Needless to say, as she grew older her understanding became more sophisticated and the categories became more specific. She learned the difference between kitties and horses, and learned the difference between horses and ponies, and even learned to know some horses by name. They certainly weren’t kitties any more.

We all do this. It’s an essential human trait. We don’t know each animal individually. Neither do we know every person individually, and so we categorize. People from New England are standoffish. Southerners are warm. Texans are loud.
When I was young in New Jersey, there were many jokes that characterized people. I still remember an embarrassingly long list of Polish jokes, each one designed to suggest they were not smart, or worse. Not unlike Nathanael, I learned that certain people, as represented by where they came from, were unlikely to be of value.

I pray that as I encounter new ideas, new people, and new places, I do not let my categories and assumptions blind me but, as Philip said to Nathanael, I can “Come and see.”

Psalms 30, 32, 43, 43; Deut. 7:17-26; Titus 3:1-15; John 1:43-51
Sunday, February 22

Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.
1 Cor 1:31

Recently, I heard Karen Armstrong, a theologian, being interviewed on To the Best of Our Knowledge on NPR. Her latest book, The Great Transformation, talks about the roots of all of the world’s religions. Judaism, Hinduism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism all began between 900 and 200 BC, according to Ms. Armstrong, and all as a reaction to the extreme violence of that time. The great sages of this Axial Era, she said, although they were separated by distance and time, found a path to peace through letting go of the Ego.

Humans are instinctively egotistical creatures, easily proud, easily provoked when we’re threatened. The sages believed, though, that we could transcend the “I,” in part through compassion for the Other. Confucius coined the Golden Rule, which is shared in all religions, and told his followers, as Jesus told his, that this was the most important principle for them to understand and practice.

Ms. Armstrong defines religious practice as the hard work we need to do to find meaning in the world. A central part of that hard work is to consciously be aware of whatever causes us the slightest pain and to consciously not inflict that pain on others. Another key practice is to counter our instinct at every turn and let go of pride.
I attended a class a couple of years ago that was taught by a Hindu sage and focused on the teachings of the Ashtavakra Gita, an ancient Hindu sacred text. One of its core concepts is “You are not the Doer.” Paul is saying the same thing here: “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.” Paul is calling us to a practice of denial of the ego. Although this is difficult, all of the great sages assure us that ultimately it is the path to both outer and inner peace.

How do we let go of pride? We have to notice it first. Instinct is fast. I might catch myself thinking, for instance, “Gosh I’ve written a really great meditation!”

My practice of letting go of pride can then follow, intentionally. “What a wonder it is how God works through my mind, my hands, and my heart!”

Psalms 63:1-8(9-11), 98, 103; Deut. 8:1-10; I Cor. 1:17-31; Mark 2:18-22
Monday, February 23

The readings today seem to have a theme of family and remembering. In Deuteronomy, the message I received is, “Remember what God did for you and your ancestors.” So often the message in scripture is “Remember”. The basis for our faith in God looking forward is based on our experiences of God being there for us in the past. We need to take the time to reflect on all the ways God has been there for us and our loved ones.

In Hebrews, we are told that we are Jesus’ brothers and sisters. He was fully human in every way. He knows what temptation feels like because he experienced it. He knows what it is like to feel impatient with God because even Jesus agonized over God forsaking him on the cross.
In John’s gospel, Jesus’ mother motivates him to act when he turns water to wine. Family is important. Sometimes our family can be our impetus to act. We need God but we also need people. Even Jesus’ family had an impact on his actions and life.

Psalm 44 again reminds us to remember what God has done for us. Through God alone we can be victorious, not by our own efforts. When God seems distant, we need to refresh our memories with times that he’s been close. It’s ok to tell him we are impatient, or don’t feel we deserve our plight. Since he cares most about us being in a relationship with him, it’s ok to tell him our grievances.

*Psalms 41, 52, 44; Deut. 8:11-20; Heb. 2:11-18; John 2:1-12*
Tuesday, February 24

John 2: 13-22

Rome had conquered Israel before Jesus’s birth. The Romans appointed Herod Antipas and the temple priests as the local puppets to maintain control. Jesus and his brothers were tektons, or day laborers, the lowest of the low in Israeli society. Coming from Nazareth, they were all probably hired by Herod Antipas, a foreigner, hated by Israelis. In order to receive public approval, Herod started rebuilding many public sites and the city of Caesarea.

As I work with my hands, I think about many issues. As Jesus toiled, he must have thought about the annual trips to Jerusalem made by everyone to atone for their sins by buying sacrificial animals in the temple from the priests and their wealthy families. The Levites had made a lucrative industry out of spiritual redemption.

He felt that this process did not connect him with God, so he came to believe the way was made through prayer, meditation, forgiveness, and helping the disenfranchised. He realized that energy used for revenge usually created collateral damage to others. He found the most effective way to change others was by setting an example. So he began sharing with others, healing the sick, and respecting the downtrodden.

Jesus slowly developed a theology that dealt with the root causes of man’s separation from God rather than exploiting the symptoms.
When he began his ministry he stayed away from the large cities. As his audience grew, he knew he would ultimately have to challenge the authority of the temple priests and be charged with sedition. The penalty for sedition against Rome was crucifixion. When he disrupted the temple he chose to seal his fate.

I appreciate the spiritual freedom we all have to seek connection with God and the opportunities we have as we choose our own path for our journey. The example Jesus set makes me realize that we are all mirrors to one another and we effectively teach others by the example we set. What a great opportunity for growth we have when we share our journey together.

*Psalms 45, 48; Deut. 9:4-12; Heb. 3:1-11; John 2:13-22*
Wednesday, February 25

The Lord was angry with Aaron and his followers, who had rebelled against God’s commandments. They had worshipped a false idol cast in the shape of a calf. Moses had prayed for Aaron, and he took the cast idol, burned it in the fire, crushed it, ground it to a powder as fine as dust, and threw the dust into a stream that flowed down a mountain.
Being human, we have our failings. We fall away from mindfulness and doing what is just and good for our relationships. The outcome may be a flawed relationship with God or with a spouse, friend, family member, neighbor, or colleague. But as Episcopalians, we have our FAITH that gives us the impetus to keep returning to our church, coming together in worship, and being shown our path once again. Finding and following God’s path might be inspired or found in the beauty of our wilderness. I feel my spirit renewed when I visit this place. Walking this path restores my HOPE and a willingness to follow God’s teachings.

*Psalm 119:49-72, 49; Deut. 9:13-21; Heb. 3:12-19; John 2:23-3:15*
Thursday, February 26

John 3:16-21

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

John 3:16 is probably one of the most popular verses in the Bible. I hear it in many places and by many people. I’ve read stories about this verse that have gone viral on the internet. I believe many people believe in God and I wonder if that is the end for them. I believe, therefore, I will live forever. Period.

I suppose that is enough for some people, but it is not for me. I lived that way before because I lacked a relationship with God. There sure were fun times living in the dark. But there were also sad times, hurtful times, and times where I didn’t know where to go, what to do, or whom to believe. I was sad, alone, hopeless. I was longing for something I didn’t know was missing.
A college friend introduced me to the light, but it scared me, so I left. It was years later when I allowed the light of God to enter my life and I’ve kept Him close by ever since. Isn’t pain a great motivator?

My life is so different today. Today I have a relationship with the one who loved me so much, that he allowed his Son to die for me so that I can be forgiven and live forever in the light with the one and only living God.

What a gift! To live in the light means to right my wrongs, to seek wise people, to notice hurts, to lend a hand, to love unconditionally, to seek God everywhere, in everything, and in everyone. To say I’m sorry . . . and sometimes that means I need to change my ways. And that can be hard too. My deeds are always exposed to God and I am so glad they are. Accountability is so freeing. There is no place to hide. God is all-forgiving. I sincerely repent. He forgives not because of what I’ve said or done, but because of who He is. He is the light of the world, as the song goes.

This light is free, and not many things in this world are truly free. I must stay aware. I must accept. I must take action. I must stay in the light. And it all started because I chose to BELIEVE.
Friday, February 27

*Circumcise then your heart...*

How often do we say, “I love you?” For me, in marriage, saying these words with intent has a way of making me focus on my beloved. It is a reality check of sorts that, no matter what the day brings, words said and not said, things done and left undone, I have a relationship built on love and trust. I find that those simple words can both heal and lay me bare.

How often do I say these words to God? Probably not enough. There is my Sunday worship, scattered prayers, and intentional thinking, but not enough. And like my marriage, saying I love you can open me up to hear and notice things that I have been missing.

*I love you, Lord. I have set aside some time for us to be together. Speak to me today.*
Psalms 95, 40, 54, 51; Deut. 10:12-22; Heb. 4:11-16; John 3:22-36
Saturday, February 28

A Psalm of David
Psalm 138: 1–2

I will praise thee with my whole heart; before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.
2 I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving-kindness and for thy truth; for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

Playing the piano in church since I was very young, the words in hymns have helped me feel closer to God.

Hymn

Oh Lord my God! when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
thy power through-out the universe displayed.
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee,
how great thou art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee;
how great thou art, how great thou art!

When we are worried, and friends and family can’t help us and are growing weary of our problem, God offers us a liberating alternative to worry. “Cast your burden upon [me] and [I] will sustain you”(Psalm55:22). He doesn’t erase the ills; he shields us
from the weight of worry by taking the situation into his own hands. It truly helps me, to remember that Bible verse!

Hymn

O Jesus I have promised to serve thee to the end,
be thou forever near me, my Master and my friend.
I shall not fear the battle if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if thou wilt be my guide.

Psalms 55, 138, 139; Deut. 11:18-28; Heb. 5:1-10; John 4:1-26
Sunday, March 1

*Corinthians 3:18 If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age let him become a fool that he may become wise.*

Wisdom combined with Pride is the height of a kind of dangerous foolishness, isn’t it? Indeed, Paul outlines here a litmus test for charlatans. Don’t follow the man who boasts he is wise, because in that very boast he will have been shown to be a fool. Only God knows the answers. Only God has enough information to judge.

Paul wants those who think they are wise to take one more step into true foolishness. The Fools hold the keys. And it is because, I think, they have lost their egos. A fool doesn’t know any answers. He is very aware of all of the paradoxes of human experience, but he doesn’t take one side or the other. He just looks at the unsolvable problems with awe. Or with humor.
There were many healers in Jesus’s time, but they all charged a hefty fee for their services. Jesus came along and healed people for free. No ego. He sought and followed God’s will for exactly no personal gain, in fact, with the view that the only thing that could come of it all for him, personally, was painful death. Follow the fool, Paul tells us. And, if we want to become a fool or to be more like one, lose our egos. Let go of pride. Journey, be childlike and spontaneous and fun, tell the truth, have faith.

Ah, if only that were easy.

Psalms 24, 29, 8, 84; Jeremiah 1:1-10; 1 Cor. 3:11-23; Mark 3:31-4:9
Monday, March 2

HOPE

How grateful I am that God knows me—
really knows me.
God has a purpose for me—
for all people.

Opening my eyes to see what is around me—
even when it’s hard to look at.
Trusting that God will deliver me because—
God is always with me.

Praying with thanksgiving for all that God is—
and does.
Glorifying God for all creation—
it nourishes us.

Everlasting is God’s love—
listening to our cries.
Steadfast and faithful—
God becomes man for us.
Psalms 56, 57, 64, 65; Jeremiah 1:11-19; Romans 1:1-15; John 4:27-42
Tuesday, March 3

*With God rests my salvation and my glory: He is my Rock of unyielding strength and impenetrable hardness, and my refuge is in God!*  
Psalm 62:7

When I tell people that I am a pediatric hospice nurse it is usually a conversation stopper, or I get one of the following responses:  
“That must be so sad”—Yes it can be; “You must be a very special person”—I don’t believe I’m any more special than any other person; “How do you do that?”—This is my chance to share my faith.

As David writes in his psalm, “God is my strength and my refuge.” I believe that God calls us to use the gifts he has given us to do his work in the world and then stands there beside us to be the rock to lean on when the going gets tough.
Lent is the perfect time to truly examine our hearts and minds and ask ourselves, “Am I doing what God is calling me to do? How can I do more to further God’s kingdom?” I encourage you to try to take a step outside of your comfort zone and know that God will be there.

Looking at John’s gospel passage about the healing at Bethesda—it is familiar to me. It is also new. Jeremiah prophecies of Jerusalem—when the ark will be remembered no more, Jerusalem will be the Throne of the Lord and all the nations will be gathered to it. As I come to Bethesda in Jerusalem, as usual, I get tangled up in literality.

My incredulity (duh???) that Jesus leads with such an obvious question—“Do you want to be healed?”—is first to mind. But the infirm man does not respond with incredulity. He allows Jesus to question his view of healing. When Jesus gives the outside-the-box command to rise, take up your bed, and walk—the man obeys. And in the doing, he is healed. After 38 years of helplessly watching and waiting, he never did get in the pool. And all the while, he does not know Jesus’s identity.
The religious authorities knew Jesus. They took issue with his healing on the Sabbath. Jesus didn’t honor their authority or their literality. Jesus didn’t live to their expectations. For this, they sought to have Jesus killed. Jesus’s response to them was and is, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.”

What shapes my actions? Am I willing to be questioned? Let go expectations? Enter into being well?

May I respond to Jesus when he reveals himself, saying, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more lest a worse thing come upon you.”

Thursday, March 5

Help us to speak with mature experience with the Lord. May we always have hope, love, and praise for God. God restores us and fulfills all our needs. Our prayer is to be present with God now and for eternity. We praise you, dear God, for sending the Lord Jesus Christ, who made the supreme sacrifice to save us from our sin, that we may spend eternity in heaven.

Follow Commandments

Dear God, we come to you lifting our souls that you may fill them with your love, faith, understanding, goodness, and a deep desire to follow and obey your commandments.

Please instruct us and teach us the way that we should go in this new beginning of Easter.

Each morning, open our eyes to your unfailing love and the beauty of your world. May we be aware of the singing the of the birds, the glorious sunrise, the beauty of all the earth—the mountains, the trees, the rivers and the seas, the sky and the stars.

May we find delight as we travel through the day with you, our God, as our guide. We praise you, we love you. We give you our grateful thanks for Jesus, our savior.
Martha Lou Reynolds

Please prepare us to be worthy to live with you in eternity. Your presence gives us unending comfort. We love you.

You have told us there is no place we go that your hand will not guide us. You give us such reassurance and faith that our spirits can withstand any condition. We love you, we praise you; our hearts rejoice to know that you are near.

We pray to be the best we can be at all times. Again, we ask you to write your commandments on our hearts; your servants we would be. Please hear our prayer.

Psalms 71, 74; Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28; Romans 2:12-24; John 5:19-29
Friday March 6

“The works my Father has given me to carry out, these same works of mine testify that the Father has sent me.” John 5:36.

I like the “alternative” prayer that we say after communion, the one on page 366. It has the phrase “and now Father, send us out to do the things you have given us to do” and goes on to remind us what those things are—“to love and serve you as faithful witnesses.”

Jesus had some tremendous works to carry out—spreading a word and a way of living that was hard for people to accept. It didn’t feel comfortable, and it wasn’t what they wanted to hear.

We have works to do as well—things we do daily that show to ourselves and to others that love and service are at the heart of our actions. There are small things and big things, some of which people
notice and some they don’t. “Sure, go ahead of me in the grocery line. You have a gallon of milk and a loaf of bread and 2 small children hanging on you.” “I don’t have to have THAT parking space. There’s another over there.” “OK, I’ll serve on that committee.”

Greater works that make a significant difference in the world are not what most people do. We all can’t be Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King. We do what we can do.
And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds.

Poor Jesus. His own brothers don’t believe in him; the crowds are muttering and complaining; nobody seems to be receiving his message well at all. And yet he perseveres, heading off to the festival and continuing on his mission that he knows will only end in his death. The human part of him must have seriously contemplated throwing in the towel and taking off on a cruise instead.

But the God part of him shouldn’t have been surprised—after all, crowds have always complained considerably about God, from the early biblical stories right on up to the present day. Adam and Eve complained, Abraham complained, the people of the Exodus complained, the disciples complained. And so do we. We liked it better in Egypt; you told us we would get a prize if we did this but there is no prize; we were really happier in our fishing boats. Can’t you just leave us to our own devices, God?

Freedom and new life is hard. It demands that we change, that we let go of long-cherished habits and accustomed routines. Even though the habits are bad for us, even though the routines
have us depressed and stuck, it’s hard to embrace the full life God has in mind for us. That’s why there have been so many prophets throughout history—the message of God’s yearning love and desire for us is one that has to be repeated over and over again.

And yet, God willingly does repeat it, always ready to reach out and bring us in, always ready to welcome us home—even when we’re crabby and grumbling. Sometimes we weary ourselves so much with our complaining that we finally stop, finally look up into God’s love, and accept it. And God, ever ready, leads us beside the waters, feeds us and nourishes us with love, and we know again that all is well. May we turn once again today to that love and life.

_Psalms 75, 76, 23, 27; Jeremiah 5:20-31; Romans 3:19-31; John 7:1-13_
Sunday, March 8

I believe that since we began compiling our Lenten Meditations, God was in the very midst of each and every one of us, those writing as well as those reading. I have always felt that whether the Bible verses were assigned or, as this year, chosen by us, those verses were specifically for that person to have the readings spark something in themselves or to open the eyes of someone else to whom God is wanting to convey a message through reading the interpretations. I believe we are all intermingled that way in life as we share thoughts and feelings with one another.

One of the reasons I love being an Episcopalian is that we believe God gave us amazing brains (some better than others) and that it is possible for scripture to speak to each of us differently on the same passage and to even have a deeper, different meaning as we study and grow spiritually. Early on, I feel, we understand what we read and receive mostly a black and white understanding. But as time goes by, or by listening to someone else’s ideas, we may be able to see a perspective different from our original viewpoint.

With that said, first I read Jeremiah where he is pleading with Judah to turn from the wicked ways and to follow God. His passion for redemption is such that he is called “the weeping prophet.” Unfortunately, I am well aware of my shortcomings and my own “wicked ways.” I guess we will struggle with this for eternity, since we never seem to get it quite right. But we are assured we have “grace” through Christ’s death on the cross available if we truly repent of our sins. DARK TIMES.

In Corinthians, we get a healthy dose of what sexual immorality means. READ FOR YOURSELF.
Debbie Estill

DARKER TIMES . . .

As I tread deeper and deeper into my inadequacies, I feel as though I am going into a deep, dark place where, as in Mark, I’m actually faced with Jesus’s casting demons out of a man into pigs, only to have them run off a cliff and drown. Dramatic, but ENCOURAGING.

Then, I smile because see the next group of readings is from Psalms! Ah-hhhhh. Of course, not all of the verses are uplifting and encouraging but, happily, these are: TRUST, JOY, PRAISE, FAITH, LOVE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, REDEMPTION, DELIVERANCE.

Psalm 93—Jesus is on the throne and he reigns supreme yesterday, today, and tomorrow! YEA.

Psalm 96—Jesus wants us to PRAISE HIM and PROCLAIM HIS GLORY throughout the world. YES.

Psalm 34—God is the answer to prayer, and we should offer praise for those whose prayers are answered as well as to God for all His Blessings on us. We also have the assurance that the Lord hears the prayers of the righteous. AMEN.

In those days, according to my NIV Bible, There were a couple of “poor” referred to a person “without resources to effect his own deliverance.” And “because the Lord is good, all who trust in Him will lack nothing good, but to experience good days we must shun evil and do good.”

Do you suppose all these random verses throughout the Bible are placed together on March 8 for a reason? I, for one, am happy that all the Doom and Despair has the possibility for Glory to our God in the end.

Psalms 93, 96, 34; Jeremiah 6:9-15; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; Mark 5:1-20
Monday, March 9

John 7:37-52

There are two distinct stories in this reading. The first is that Jesus is speaking of “rivers of life” and “living water” being offered to all. The second concerns the unwillingness of the Pharisees to believe that he is the messiah, and their desire is to discredit him.

The notion of discounting Jesus is repeated often in the telling of his life. We still spend our lives trying to do the same thing to people of power and importance today. So that part of the story has never seemed out of place to me and I have always accepted it as human nature, the need to be secure in our current thoughts and beliefs.

The stronger part of this story is the simplistic idea that salvation is here for all who seek it. There are no prerequisites, no requirements,
and no need for third party approval. I see this as a reminder that all of Christ’s teachings, love, and path to salvation are meant for all.

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.” There are NO exceptions mentioned here or anywhere else in his teachings. How can I possibly pretend to add stipulations and barriers on this basic premise? Anyone is a pretty strong word and thought. I hope that I can be that open-ended in my dealings with my fellow man as I struggle with my own path in this world and the next.
God Provides a Leader

Psalm 78 is a litany of the history of Israelites from the time they left Egypt to the time they went into captivity by the Philistines. The psalm tells the story of God’s love and provision for his people and of his people’s rebelling against him again and again.

Vv. 37, 38: Their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them.

Finally, God rejects the tribe of Joseph and the tribe of Ephraim, choosing the tribe of Judah to carry the lineage of our savior, Jesus Christ. He sets Judah apart and proceeds to find a leader for the people of the tribe of Judah.

God reads the Parish Profile created by the search committee of the tribe of Judah and reviews the qualities the elders of Judah want in their leader. The psalm records what God did then:

Vv. 70–72: He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.
The ECA search committee is prayfully following the well-designed search process of the Episcopal Church as we describe who we are, where we want to go, and what type of rector we want to lead us. Candidates are discerning where they feel God is calling them to serve.

I am afraid we would miss out on David’s being our rector because he does not fit our ideal candidate. He is too young, lacks experience and education, and is not dressed like the rest of us.

If we find someone too much like us, we may remain status quo and not break out of boxes we have built for ourselves. If we look for someone who “thinks like us,” we may not be challenged to see our faith, our prayers, and our community from other perspectives. It is my prayer that God will surprise us by giving us what we need and not what we want.

_Psalms 78:1-39, 40-72; Jeremiah 7:21-34; Romans 4:1-12; John 7:14-36_
Wednesday, March 11

After reading the selections, one passage spoke to me: John 8:12-20. Our Lord says, “You judge by human standards; I judge no one.” Actually, there is a subtle theme referring to judging throughout all the selections. We humans seem to be guilty of making judgments, often without thinking or having all the facts.

There always seems to be a need for improvement and prayer. And so the journey continues.
Psalms 119:97-120, 81, 82; Jeremiah 8:18-9:6; Romans 5:1-11; John 8:12-20
Thursday, March 12

Psalm 42:9 I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me?”
Like many people, I suffer from depression, anxiety . . . dark nights of the soul. My world becomes empty and black. There is no escape. My doubts, my fears, my enemies ask, “Where is your God?” (Ps 42:3)

Like the psalmist, I ask God, “Why have you forgotten me?” (Ps 42:9) And I wait for his answer. I wait and I wait and I wait. Like the psalmist, I know that my soul needs God. It “thirsts for God, for the living God.” (Ps 42:2) But I pull the covers over my head, cry, and wait.

The psalmist also feels alone, afraid, surrounded by enemies. He questions God and cries in despair.

Then, unlike me, he takes a moment to remember his faith. He remembers joy. He remembers going to the house of God with his friends, processing “with glad shouts and songs of praise” (Ps 42:4) Unlike me, when he is cast down, he remembers that God is with him and his people always. “By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.” (Ps 42:8)
Melinda Jennings

He questions his doubts, his fears, his enemies. He does not wait for God to find him. He looks for God, asking:

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
And why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God;
For I shall again praise him,
My salvation and my God. (Ps 42:11)

Next time my soul is cast down and in turmoil, I want to be like the psalmist. I pray that I remember to hope in God.

Psalms 42, 43, 85, 86; Jeremiah 10:11-24; Romans 5:12-21; John 8:21-32
Friday, March 13

I had agreed to do a Lenten meditation for the first time—now how did I proceed? I began reading Jeremiah slowly and paused at the word that seemed to whisper to me with a little more emphasis.

Covenant?? Covenant is not a common word in everyday non-church language, and yet three times that day I had seen this word in the outside community. Something to be curious about, so I began to consider what this word meant.

Covenant—a relationship with God that we enter into willingly.

Covenant—a promise from God and from Jesus that if we follow their commandments we will be loved and brought fully into the kingdom of God.

Covenant—a statement of our beliefs, the Baptismal Covenant.

I realized, as is often the case when we become comfortable and familiar with something, that we do not always recognize the
Ellen Lukanc

importance of the words we pledge. I have been saying those words my entire life, but did I really state them in a thoughtful, purposeful way?

Lent is a time of looking at ourselves, of reflection and preparing for Easter Day. This is a time to examine the covenants that God and Jesus have given to us and it is a time for us to look at our baptismal beliefs with new vision and commitment.

Psalms 88, 91, 92; Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-20; Romans 6:1-11; John 8:33-47
Saturday, March 14

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ.
Romans 6:23

When I was a little girl, the route to my grandparents’ house took us past Victory Temple, a small, red-brick church with a big, black-framed, neon-lit marquee in front. The marquee read: THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH!

In my memory, the words never changed. It was always the same message, and it always puzzled me. To begin with, it was the only church marquee I’d ever seen; I thought for some time that it must be a strange kind of movie theatre. After I learned that it was a church, I wondered why they always had the same words. The movie houses changed the words on their signs. Why didn’t the church ever have new words?

I was puzzled, but those words also stayed with me. Someone thought they were important, and for many years, those words were one of the barriers that kept me from faith. It never occurred to me to ask anyone what those words meant.
There wasn’t a lot of attention to scripture in our house, so it was a long time before I happened across that text in my own reading. The letters leapt off the page at me, and I was shocked to realize that the words that had framed part of my understanding of “church” and “religion” were only part of the sentence.

Again, I was puzzled. Why did the folks at Victory Temple choose that part of that text to attract people’s attention? Why did they use the threat of death to frighten people into community? Why not a sign that says: YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN! REJOICE!

Some days, fear can get the upper hand in our lives. As we examine our hearts during our journey through Lent to Easter, I pray that our focus can be on the love that sets us free instead of the fear that can enslave us.

Psalms 87, 90, 136; Jeremiah 13:1-11; Romans 6:12-23; John 8:47-59
Sunday, March 15

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.*
Psalm 19:14

When these lines from the psalm first jumped out at me, I thought about all the preachers I’ve heard pray these words as they prepared to preach the Sunday homily. It’s not my custom to pray out loud before I preach—although my heart is busy doing just that as I step forward to proclaim the gospel and as I begin to preach.

As I’ve reflected on that, I thought about all the other times I speak in front of somebody: when I speak to folks on the phone or in the office or during a meeting or at the grocery store or through the closed car window when someone cuts me off on the freeway. Then I thought about the fact that 99% of my speech happens when I’m not preaching, and that brought me up short.

As I move through the days of Lent, trying to prepare my heart for the joy of Easter, I’m resolving to keep the words of this psalm in mind instead of trying to fix everything that I find less than desirable about my behavior. Perhaps this is the year I can learn to curb my impulse to speak without asking myself if what I’m about to say is true, kind, helpful, and timely.
Our words hold power. They can never be taken back. They go out into the world, and we never know quite how they are heard or what they are doing. So, I pray for the discipline to wait for a moment before I speak, to consider what purpose my words will serve, and to ask if perhaps my silence might be more acceptable to God than my words.

I’ve rarely regretted unspoken words.

Psalms 93, 96, 34; Jeremiah 14:1-9, 17-22; Galatians 4:21-5:1; Mark 8:11-21
Monday, March 16

Hundreds stretched out on lush green grass, passing around food that fills everyone’s belly with seemingly very little. I wonder how hungry the people were the day they spent listening to Jesus—the day a small child showed up with a scant couple of fish and a few loaves of cheap bread. What if someone didn’t like fish—were they hungry enough to eat it anyway?

As a woman of privilege, I rarely have to eat something I don’t like. No, I am not hungry for food, but I have been hungry for other things like love, patience, and peace of mind, to name a few. I have not always liked what Jesus has offered me in order to satisfy my hunger. Sometimes it takes me a while to see, accept, and give thanks for I’ve been given.

Lord God,

In my hunger for deeper faith, help me to remember that Jesus will provide all that I need, and then some.

Amen
Karen Cuffie

Psalms 89; Jeremiah 16:10-21; Romans 7:1-12; John 6:1-15
Tuesday, March 17

The scripture passages assigned for the day speak to me in various ways. Psalm 95, the Venite, has always been a favorite, calling us to worship, praise, singing, and thanksgiving. In Romans, Paul exhorts us to overcome our sinful natures with the help of Christ.

Both of these themes form the core of my call to worship. The joy found in the weekly celebration; the opportunity to spend a bit of focused attention on how I’ve done for the last week, thinking of how I might do better; and receiving forgiveness in confession and absolution and renewal in the Eucharistic experience. This is not a process of berating myself for my shortcomings but of performing an assessment of my recent actions and interfaces with others and the world around me.

Every week provides a new opportunity to try to live a Christian life in an ever more complex world. We live in society where the media thrives on blame, judgment, retribution, and public punishment, hardly ever addressing forgiveness and, in many cases, ridiculing the misfortunes and mistakes of others.
Andy Kerr

Penitence and atonement do not need to be depressing experiences but may be celebrated as a way to strive to do better through a feeling of renewal. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, I experience a miniLent and Easter.

Lent is not a time to feel sad and depressed but is a more extended period of time for self assessment and identification of opportunities to live in Christ.

Psalms 97, 99, 94; Jeremiah 17:19-27; Romans 7:13-25; John 6:16-27
John 6:32

Then Jesus said to them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

But I said unto you, that ye also have seen me, and believe not.

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

It may surprise those of you who know me, and know my sensitivity, that I may be one of our community’s most pragmatic, most skeptical souls. I do believe I am the emotional bellwether of the late service, generally crying a good 30 seconds before anyone else (and at least once a month). At the same time I am a researcher and a statistician. I deal in proofs and significance, evidence and
challenging outcomes. I am surrounded by science geeks who can explain everything.

Yet I am also surrounded by my ECA family, fellow researchers, scientists, and geeks, who somehow feel in their cores that there is something beyond science. A higher power, a son whose father so loved people – all people – that he sacrificed that son.

Can you imagine that love! I struggle with that. I have a new grandson and believe me, I would slay every dragon to protect him. The idea that our God would sacrifice his son is hard to wrap my head around. Lots of times I just give up.

BUT what brings my heart back to home are the times that I am a lay reader and chalice bearer. When I see my friends and family so contemplative, so faithful. We make eye contact as I offer the chalice and I am so moved. I am a vehicle between you and your God. It rocks me every time.

You come, in whatever place you are in at that moment, and I can feel it—frowning, shoulders slumping, you need God’s love especially; the children who almost devour the host and slurp the wine—so raw; and most common, we who are blessed to be stable in health and relationships but whose eyes show how grateful you are to be in that group now. Because we have all been tossed by the waves of life, and now, when the waters are calm, we are so grateful.

Thank you for entrusting me with your worship. It is an honor.

Thursday, March 19

*I will praise the name of God with a song:*
*I will magnify him with thanksgiving.*
*This will please the Lord more than an ox.*
*Or a bull with horns and hoofs.*

Psalm 69:30-31

Sometimes God puts people in my life to teach me lessons. Clarence was one. Clarence was an 82-year-old French man (complete with beret), a Renaissance man of many talents, with a gigantic loving heart.

A move to a smaller house caused me to seriously downsize. I had a collection of classical music that needed a new home—a new home where it would be treasured and loved.

Clarence and his love of music came to mind. Clarence not only thanked me for the present but he also looked at each album and commented about the beauty of the music and talent of the composers. He then played *Claire du Lune*, one of his personal favorites, for me.
Being a recipient of Clarence’s appreciation was a joyous, incredible gift. I’ve remembered it more than most presents I’ve received. I wonder how appreciated God feels when we take time to fully thank him for his awesome gifts and creations.

Psalms 69:1-23(24-30)31-38, 73; Jeremiah 22:13-23; Romans 8:12-27; John 6:41-51
Friday, March 20

Romans 8:29, 31, 32 Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all . . .

Lent is essentially the forty days preceding Easter. I see it as a time to look ahead, to focus on the coming Easter, when God gave his own Son to accomplish my redemption.

It is a time to repent, to be sure. How can I focus on the sacrifice of God’s own Son on my behalf without repenting of my shortcomings that made such a sacrifice necessary. I make frequent use of the opportunity to repent each week in church before the Eucharist (and lots of other times as well).

But I think repentance is only one side of how we respond to God’s redeeming act. The psalmist says, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” If God gave his most precious Son for my redemption, then I need to embrace my redemption. I need to accept the fact that through Christ I’m in good standing before God (justified). And I need to continue on with the process of being conformed to the image of his Son.
To me, that means change, gradual and continual change, because I’m certainly not there yet. But as I look back at the past year, perhaps I’ve made a little progress here and there. Perhaps there have been times when I’ve gotten beyond my usual self-centeredness, or times when I’ve sensed God’s quiet voice getting through to me about my wayward thoughts, words, or actions. Perhaps there have been times when I’ve succeeded at loving God and loving my neighbor as myself.

And now, if I can make good choices, perhaps I can build on that. And if I’ve slipped backwards at some point along the way, perhaps I can get back on the right path again, the path of being conformed to the image of God’s Son, and begin forward progress again. I see it as a lifelong process, never arriving, but moving closer to the goal as much as possible.

John 6:60–71

The prequel to these verses contains the story of the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus’s preaching to the crowds about his being the “bread of life.”

In the first part of the story, the crowd witnessed a miracle as they were fed from a few loaves of bread and a couple of fishes, with the leftovers being greater than the initial amount. The people were saying, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world,” and they were all believing and wanting to follow him.

In the second part of the story, Jesus is talking to the crowd again, after they found him, and stating that they are not there because of his miraculous signs but because they had their stomachs filled. Jesus tells them to not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life. He then tells them that he is “the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never go thirsty.”

But after this, the people who have witnessed miracles are already grumbling and doubting him. They discuss his being the son of Joseph and Mary, and how can he be “sent down from heaven”? Jesus then tells them that he is “the living bread that came down from heaven, and if they eat of this bread, he will live forever.” Then again, the crowd argues among themselves, asking, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”
This brings us to the verses for today. In John 6:60, some of the disciples describe Jesus’s talks as “hard teaching. Who can accept it?” And verse 67 reports that many of Jesus’s disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

It is so easy to follow Jesus when the path is easy, when our stomachs are full, when we are comfortable. But when his word makes us uncomfortable; when verse after verse makes us question whether we are truly following his teachings or following them enough; when suddenly we are pushed out of our comfortable places into unfamiliar territory, where we are asked to take risks, to give more of ourselves than we are comfortable with, to be open to ideas that seem alien and too “out there” to fit into our ordered and predictable lives—will we say to Jesus that this is a hard teaching and then grumble and walk away?

Jesus’s preaching and his calling out the hypocrisy of their world were huge and frightening changes for the people of his time, just as the changes happening in our church can seem pretty overwhelming and frightening to us. But when Jesus asks us, as he did his 12 apostles, “Do you want to leave me too?”, I hope that your answer will be the same as that of Simon Peter who answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Sunday, March 22

Mark 8:31-9:1

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it.

Recently I shared during a homily that I had been away from the church for at least twenty years, except for rare weddings and funerals. When I went into church one morning about twenty-five years ago, I felt called back into faith. I experienced a sense of presence that I couldn’t identify, but I knew somehow that the Spirit was trying to pull me back into the place where I belonged.

I knew that was happening, but I was having none of it, because I also knew that if I decided to follow Jesus, my life was going to change. I did not want my life to change. I liked my life just the way it was, with no claims on it except from family and work. My life wasn’t perfect—there were definitely some things about it that I wanted to change—but I liked my life. I knew how it worked, and that was just fine with me.

Apparently the life I was living was not just fine with God. The Spirit kept nudging and poking at me. I pushed and argued back.
Linda Taylor

It took a while, but I finally realized that this was a call I couldn’t ignore or refuse. Later on, other things happened, and in January I celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of my ordination. I have never regretted putting down my old life—the life I clung to so tenaciously.

Since the moment I said “Yes” to God, my life has bloomed with richness that I could never have imagined. The rough patches that every life contains have been easier to negotiate, and the joyous parts of life bring me amazement every single day. My days begin and end with gratitude, and I am thankful that God’s loving grace continued to seek me through all the years I refused to hear God’s call.

Psalms 118, 145; Jeremiah 23:16-32; 1 Cor. 9:19-27; Mark 8:31-9:1
Monday, March 23

Psalm 31:5
Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of truth.

For many years, I was a white-knuckle flyer. My awareness of the statistical unlikelihood of a crash didn’t help my fear. Every bump, every strange sound, was a signal to me of our impending demise. In retrospect, I’m fairly sure that being completely out of control of the situation—putting someone else in charge of my life at 30,000 feet—was at the core of my fear.

Of course, the truth is that we’re rarely in charge of our lives. In addition to our own life experiences, the headlines, cyber news, and airwaves bear witness to the way external events change our world and shift our lives. Our responses to those events, changes, and shifts are just as visible in the media, as people struggle to find their footing on a path that’s changing with every step.

In times of great upheaval, such as is happening on almost every level in our world, it’s easy for us to lose sight of the center that holds us. Our anxiety opens us to distraction by the things we believe we can control. Those of us who have experienced cataclysmic change know how easily we can develop tunnel vision that focuses our attention on those things that are
tangential to the real issues we’re experiencing. A focus on “shiny objects”—those attractive quick fixes or superficial comforts that may divert us from the pain of loss—can also limit our ability to find courage to trust in God’s abiding presence through times when our lives seem out of control.

Although I will probably never be completely comfortable on airplanes, I’ve learned that acknowledging my lack of control is helpful. These days, as I buckle my seatbelt, I pray the words of the psalm: *Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of truth.*

As I say those words, I can feel my whole body relaxing into God’s embrace, and sometimes I’m asleep before the plane takes off. I’ve only recently considered that this practice could be part of my non-flying life. When the scary times come, I do my best to remember whose I am, say these words, and hand over the controls. When I’m able to do that, something in me shifts, and the bumps and strange noises in life become easier to bear.

Try it. God may surprise you.
Tuesday, March 24

For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will be blind.

John 9:39

Chapter 9 of John is the story of the miracle of Jesus’s giving sight to a beggar who was blind from birth. After he is healed, he is taken to the Pharisees who first ask the formerly blind man about what happened, and when told, their existing beliefs about God and sin prevent them from seeing the truth about Jesus. In the verses of John 9 just before today’s reading, the Pharisees debate whether or not Jesus, the person who healed the blind man, could be from God because he had done work on the Sabbath, while on the other hand, they question how a sinner could perform such signs.

Reading today’s passage from John, I am struck by what a remarkable person the blind man was. He was very intelligent and able to hold his own in argument with the highly educated Pharisees, and I have great respect for the blind man’s courage in defying them. This was not a random choice of person to heal by Jesus. This is in contrast to his parents, who were afraid to stand up to the Pharisees because of their fear of excommunication. It is also in contrast to the Pharisees, who had beliefs they were not willing to change and, worse, used their power to discredit and hurt those who challenged them.
Jesus says, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will be blind.” The blind man was not blind to new ideas and came to see Jesus as God. The Pharisees, because of their close-mindedness, could only see what they already believed and thus were blind to the truth about Jesus.

How many times am I not open enough to new ideas and unwilling to question my own beliefs? Worse, do I act to discredit those with beliefs that are different from mine?

Healing the blind man was another of many acts of compassion Jesus showed toward people, especially those who were outcast or discriminated against by society. We are reminded in today’s reading that God “listens to the godly person who does his will.”

Jesus teaches us, by example and dialog, how to live our lives and treat others, especially those who are marginalized or in need. His will is that we follow his example in these acts of inclusion and compassion. I know this is a place where I too often fall short, and I know it’s an area where I have to challenge myself to do more.

Psalms 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126; Jeremiah 25:8-17; Romans 10:1-13; John 9:18-41
Wednesday, March 25

*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*
John 10:10

For me, the key to much in our lives is held in Jesus’ words: *I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly.*

Abundant life is not about exclusion and constriction. Neither is it about those seemingly good things that steal us away from the way that’s created for us.

Abundant life is about finding the balance between free space and the boundaries that make that space safe. That requires a gate and a gatekeeper. The gate holds the circle, maintaining the integrity of the space, reminding us who we are as individuals and community and whose we are. The gatekeeper makes sure that seekers can find the way in and that those who have been nourished are sent back into the world.
Jesus says he is both the gate and the gatekeeper. As Christ’s body in this world, we are called to be the gate, making this a safe space for all, and the gatekeeper, opening to welcome others into this place and to help each other go back out to do our work in the wild of the world.

We who have tasted abundant life are called to share with others—to be the reminder that life in Christ is bigger than our history or anything we can imagine of our future.

Thursday, March 26

John 10:19-42

What strikes me as most interesting here, is the same themes of doubting Jesus and trying to discredit him, yet again.

Jesus’s answer never changes, never staggers. “Have I not told you before? Yet you still do not believe?”

This is a story I remember well from my childhood. I was baptized in a river (the Colorado) at the age of 12. It was a time when I had many questions and angst for God and the church. The imagery of Jesus leaving the doubters and skeptics and crossing the river to be with those that knew, believed, and understood, was easy for me see on that day.

The odd part of the story is that is I left that church—left their way of thinking because it was doing and acting differently from how it was preaching. I was on the other bank of the river looking back at all of them.
For me it was a long journey back to a flock of like-minded folks. The thought that this life is here for everyone, and that I am not the one who can make judgments on behalf of Jesus or God or anyone else, is strong.

“No one can snatch them from my Fathers hand”; it is not for me, or any other worldly person, to decide.

Psalms 131, 132, 140, 142; Jeremiah 26:1-16; Romans 11:1-12; John 10:19-42
Friday, March 27

Psalm 143: 1-11 A psalm, for David

Lord, hear my prayer; listen to my plea; in your faithfulness and righteousness answer me.
Do not bring your servant to trial, for no person living is innocent before you.
An enemy had hunted me down, has crushed me underfoot, and left me to lie in darkness like those long dead.
My spirit fails me, and my heart is numb with despair.
I call to mind times long past; I think over all you have done; the wonders of your creation fill my mind.
A thirst for you like thirsty land, I lift my outspread hands to you.
Lord, answer me soon; my spirit faints. Do not hide your face from me or I shall be like those who go down to the abyss.
In the morning let me know of your love, for I put my trust in you.
Show me the way that I must take, for my heart is set on you.
Deliver me, Lord, from my enemies; with you I seek refuge.
Teach me to do your will, for you are my God;
By your gracious spirit guide me on level ground.
Revive me, Lord, for the honor of your name;
be my deliverer; release me from distress.

This psalm perfectly describes my pleas to God on the night of June 30, 2014. I was having a stroke, but didn’t know it.

I only knew that something very serious and terrifying was happening to me, and I was alone in my bed, directing my thoughts to my Maker. I figured that if this was my last night, I had better set
things as right as they could be between Him and me. There was life review; there was pleading, thanking, acknowledging, and despair. It was a long, dark night.

It came so naturally, my cries to God, to his Son Jesus, to any angels that might be listening. In extremis, there is tremendous clarification about what matters, what needs to be said, apologized for, and hoped for.

I was grateful that my prayers came so easily and naturally, that I had an established line of communication with Him. But it still felt like, and could have been, the last night of my life, and I shivered as much from fear as from pain. Was I ready? What was left undone?

I was delivered, and I was revived, and now I struggle to keep my spirit steady as I recover and adjust to a different life, with different abilities. Yet my soul remains in contact with my Lord, and He is still with me, guiding me through the unknown realms ahead.

Thank and bless you, Lord, for the gift of another day, another chance to live in this wondrous world that you created for us. Thank you for the chance to touch the hearts and hands of my fellow travelers. I hope that I am making good use of this limited time in your earthly kingdom, and I await your direction each and every day.

Psalms 22, 141, 143:1-11; Jeremiah 29:1, 4-13; Romans 11:13-24; John 11:1-27 or 12:1-10
Saturday, March 28

Psalms 42 and 43

These two psalms are conjoined to express the lament of a Hebrew who is in exile or alienated/displaced from god or who / whatever is familiar and critical to life. In 586 BCE, the people of Judah were defeated by the Babylonians and exiled, from their country and its heritage of religion, to babylonia. This was the great historical Hebrew experience of exile, and continues as a metaphor for the more general group and individual experiences of exile.

This meditation on the theme of exile is included in this ECA Lenten meditation booklet to prompt consideration of the possibility of one’s own exile. This could be appropriate as a lenten theme.

As a deer yearns for running streams
So I yearn for you, my god

The thirst of a deer is an apt description of anyone who, as the result of life’s preoccupations or trespass against another, has forfeited the relationship that anchors and gives meaning to life.

Deep is calling to deep by the roar of your cataracts
All your waves and breakers have rolled over me
Yet the exiled group or person is made aware of their estrangement by being overwhelmed by the overtopping of lived experience. This is the necessary calling that the essential relationship is missing. The Lenten season is designed to raise awareness of what is missing, perhaps unrecognized, by the ego defence mechanism called denial.

_Send out your light and your truth_  
_That they shall be my guide_  
_To lead me to your holy mountain_  
_To the place where you dwell._

As a result of one’s fresh awareness of exile, the response is not to redouble personal effort but, rather, to heighten awareness of the light and truth that is promised, unbidden, from God.

Lent fosters the expectation that denial will be broken from without, from beyond self. Consider such an expectation as a Lenten discipline.

_Psalms 137:1-6(7-9), 144, 42, 43; Jeremiah 31:27-34; Romans 11:25-36; John 11:28-44 or 12:37-50_
Sunday, March 29

Psalm 29
On this Palm Sunday, we celebrate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Palms are blessed and we are invited to hear the shouts of Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

The beginning of a busy, eventful Holy Week is upon us.

On this day, there is another image that is offered for our meditations. In the daily lectionary for today, we are invited to meditate on Psalm 29, along with other readings.

In this reading, you can see the writer of this psalm describing the power of God as like a powerful oncoming storm that sweeps from the Mediterranean Sea onto the land and races across in a hurricane-like manner. This is a powerful storm, and our God is a powerful God!

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy splendor.
As we walk through this week with Jesus and his followers, we experience God at work in the midst of his people in a manner that contrasts with that of the Psalmist’s storm. Jesus comes into our Holy week, not with a bombastic fury of a king claiming his throne but with the meekness and humility of a loving servant.

May God bless you as you travel through your Holy Week.

Psalms 24, 29, 103; Zechariah 9:9-12 or 12:9-11; 13:1, 7-9; 1 Timothy 6:12-16; Matthew 21:12-17
Monday March 30

Just for Today
Dear Lord, walk with me

Just for Today
Fill me with your Love

Just for Today
Let me know your truth

Just for Today
Let me see you

Just for Today
Guide me along my journey

Amen
Vira Melendez-Redman

Tuesday March 31

I guess there are times in all our lives when we suffer trials and tribulations, certainly some more than others and for reasons I will probably never understand. I’m actually OK with not understanding each and every detail of life.

In Jeremiah, sinful Israel is offered chance after chance to do the “right” thing. How many chances are too many to do what is right. How many times have we asked God’s forgiveness for the same sins? How many do-overs do you think we get?

Moses and Samuel were well known for their intercessions for Israel, but this time, the people were beyond help. As they continuously reject our God, his message to them was one of disaster and destruction. Jeremiah is distraught and begins to doubt himself and his mission and to question God’s faithfulness and dependability. God encourages Jeremiah and renews his call. The message to Israel was a dire one.

Philemon is a letter I should’ve read before now, especially because it is only two pages! It was written by Paul regarding Philemon’s slave Onesimus, who stole from him. Paul is very clever as he tries to manipulate Onesimus back into Philemon’s good graces. Instead of coming head on into the matter he wants to discuss, he preps the man with soothing sentiments, offering thanksgiving and prayer. Paul is a gifted writer and spokesman. He makes a few assertive comments and then steps down into a role of submissiveness, but in the end he calls Philemon to take the high road and do the right thing by forgiving Onesimus and welcoming him into the flock with open arms. Oh, to have that kind of finesse and diplomacy with words . . . a lesson here for sure.
The passage from John describes quite an assorted gathering of people in Bethany: Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Judas; presumably Matthew, Mark, John, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary; a large crowd of curious, but unbelieving, Jews; the crowd who had come for the feast; the Pharisees and chief priests; additional disciples of Jesus, Andrew, Phillip, the Greeks, who were said to be God-fearer’s but did not ultimately convert. The NIV says that the “presence of these Gentiles completes the effectiveness of the approaching crucifixion.” The reason Jesus came to Earth was to die for the whole world.

Psalm 6 appears to be a prayer used in times of severe distress and a plea for mercy. The NIV states that the Old Testament writers knew that God’s will for his people was life. They also knew that death was every man’s lot, and at its proper time the godly rested in God and accepted it with equanimity.

In Psalm 12, we receive reassuring word from the Lord. He is a righteous ruler. We pray for help when it seems there is no one who is faithful and every tongue seems false.

God, the judge in Psalm 94, amends the wrongs of wicked men of power against the meek. How long must they suffer arrogant words, boasting, and oppression? Persons living lives by following God’s law of correcting and teaching are the blessed ones. God’s judgment will restore justice to those who have a heart for God and His righteousness.

*Psalms 6, 12, 94; Jeremiah 15:1-21; Phil. 3:15-21; John 12:2-26*
Wednesday, April 1

Jeremiah 17:10
I the Lord test the mind
and search the heart,
To give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings.

HOPE
How grateful I am that God knows me—
really knows me.

God has a purpose for me—
for all people.

Opening my eyes to see what is around me—
even when it's hard to look at.

Trusting that God will deliver me because—
God is always with me.

Praying with thanksgiving for all that God is—
and does.

Glorifying God for all creation—
it nourishes us.

Everlasting is God's love—
listening to our cries.

Steadfast and faithful—
God becomes man for us.

Psalms 56, 57, 64, 65; Jeremiah 1:11-19; Romans 1:1-15; John 4:27-42
Alexanna Alvarado

1. Find a quiet place.
2. Repeat the verse aloud five times.
3. Breathe deeply, close your eyes, and sit in silence for 60 seconds.
4. Read the verse aloud again.
5. Breathe deeply, sit silently for 60 seconds.
6. Create one positive intention for your day.
7. Pray silently for at least 60 seconds.
8. Give thanks that God makes time to search your heart.

Psalms 55, 74; Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14-17; Phil. 4:1-13; John 12:27-36
Thursday April 2

We, who are many, are one body . . .
Corinthians 10:17

It is said that there is one way to heaven, one way to be accepted into the Holy lands of the Bible. David, in Psalms, knew that way. Become one with God. Become one with the spirit. His soul “has a thirst for you (God) like a parched land” (Psalm 143:6). David sought to even his distress and pain with the promise of God’s eternal love. He knew that turning his prayers to God was the only way to end his suffering.

John also knew the key to an eternal life. He not only knew he was one of God’s chosen but he also knew that just by believing in the things God said through him, others would be sanctified, “…that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” (John 17:21)

In Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, he brings this point to view. As David sings a love song to God (Psalm 142:5), and John glorifies God with preaching, Paul uses the body of Christ as an example. “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16) Truly, Paul believed that becoming one with God, through Jesus, was the only way to live, now and forever.
Turn your pain and suffering over to God. For it is through Him that we may find this eternal life; it is through Him that we will find peace. “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)
Good Friday, April 3

*And so they took the body of Jesus…*

When I was younger, I was profoundly glad that Jesus died for me. I needed the reassurance that God cared for me personally, broken as I am.

As I got older, I was profoundly glad that Jesus died for the world. All of humanity needs to be reminded of God’s care, broken as we are.

Now I am profoundly glad that Jesus died for the evil systems of the world. Jesus dared to speak truths that shook the status quo, which caused his inevitable death. I believe that we are also called to speak truth, to name systems that are hurtful to all of creation: those that kill the body and soul of our community, those that keep people in persistent poverty and hunger, and those that damage our environment.

*Thank you, Lord, for your work of redemption that was begun this day.*
1 Peter 1:10-20; John 13:36-38 or 19:38-42
Saturday April 4

Here is my meditation—not a direct response on any of the readings, but a more general reflection on the day.

Holy Saturday

All stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The Gospel begins with the joy of “God is with us” at Christmas and is met with opposition even early on with the slaughter of the innocents and the disbelieving scribes and Pharisees. We all know the end—the glorious Resurrection—but Holy Saturday is about the middle, that time when all seems hopeless but God is working.

On Friday “the women who had come with Him from Galilee . . . observed the tomb . . . then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment” (Luke 23:55-56). Meanwhile, the Lord of Heaven who physically died (can this be ever understood?) descended into Hell and freed the captives, leading us out of death to life.

The time when all seems lost and we are powerless to move may be when God sends us his greatest gift. Job knew this when he went from saying, “Have pity on me . . . for the hand of God is against me” to “for I know that my Redeemer lives.”
The psalmist of Psalm 88 complains “I am like a man who has no strength, adrift among the dead. Will you work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise you? [Spoiler alert—Matthew 27:52-53]

An ancient Christian hymn for this day goes:

Today thou dost keep holy the seventh day,
Which thou has blessed of old by resting
from Thy works.
Thou bringest all things into being and thou makest
all things new
Observing the Sabbath rest, my saviour, and
restoring strength.

Amen. Even so—Come, Lord Jesus and lead us from death to life.

Psalms 88, 27; Job 19:21-27a; Hebrews 4:1-16; Romans 8:1-11
Contributing Authors