

Friday, March 1, 2024

Do Something

By Matthew Frizzell, Director of Human Resources

[Excerpted from “Toward the Peaceful One,” May/June 2020 *Herald*, p. 19]

Undertake compassionate and just actions to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace on and for the Earth.

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:1d

In the ancient world poverty, disease, catastrophe, and war were believed to come from supernatural forces. The ancients explained misfortune as the result of sin or disfavor with the gods. This is what made Jesus’ message so powerful. He forgave sins, reached for the outcast, and blessed sinners simply for repentance, change of heart, and faith. In the worldview of Jesus, he threw himself into the problems and problemated-people of his world. In the end, he was crucified and died as one of them.

In the 21st century our worldview has changed dramatically. Modern knowledge, technology, and human systems shape almost every aspect of life globally. Wealth, health, peace, and prosperity are not the result of God’s favor or supernatural forces. Rather, they are created by individual and collective human action. They are shaped by global relationships and human systems. Therefore, poverty, disease, violence, and environmental degradation are not the result of chance, disfavor, or “acts of God.” They also are influenced and shaped by human systems, actions, and decisions. Therefore, we can do something about them.

Jesus invites us to “follow him” and face the problems and problemated-people of this world, Today, it means the same as it did in his time. It means examining ourselves. It means changing our heart, bearing our cross, symbolically turning our face to Jerusalem, and confronting the powers that be. Doctrine and Covenants 163:3b challenges us to “courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God.”

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ’s community.

Saturday, March 2, 2024

Poor in Spirit

[From *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission* by Peter Judd, Herald House, p. 40]

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever!
—Psalm 22:26

Dependency on the “things of the world” does not provide fulfillment. Rather the recognition of our complete and utter dependence on God is the only source of spiritual well-being. This concept allows us to understand what Jesus was saying in the Beatitudes when he said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Being poor in spirit refers to living one’s life under the assurance that it is only God’s grace that can be relied on for all that we are and have. Notice that Jesus is not admonishing people to be poor in spirit; rather he is pronouncing a blessing on those who are. Being poor in spirit is a gift rather than an accomplishment. And those who have this gift will experience the kingdom.

Our complete dependence on God’s grace is at the foundation of life in community, which is the basis of the kingdom of God.

Invitation is central to all that Jesus was and did. He reached out and invited those who were estranged and excluded to be part of community. This was the good news he shared and proclaimed. It was an invitation for all to be part of God’s kingdom. He was the human manifestation of what this kingdom is all about. The good news is that in Christ everyone can find their worth as God’s beloved children in community.

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Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Sunday, March 3, 2024, *Third Sunday in Lent*

The Power of Paradox

By Scott Murphy, First Presidency

For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

—1 Corinthians 1:25

Being foolish is not a human characteristic we strive for in our lives. Our culture places great emphasis on being wise, intelligent, competent, responsible, which are all good human traits. And yet, is there something about our formation as disciples of Christ where being foolish may actually be a gift to another?

Megan was an adolescent student in my choir who struggled with a low self-image. As I got to know her, I discovered that she played piano. When I was selecting music for the choir's final concert, I felt this nudge to ask her to be the accompanist for one of the songs we would perform. But I doubted this prompting because I wasn't sure she had the self-confidence needed. Wisdom told me this was a bad idea. I did not want to do anything that would cause her to feel foolish in front of her peers. But something in me said I needed to take this risk.

When I asked Megan if she would like to be an accompanist, there was a spark of joy and excitement ignited in her as she accepted. Through the daily rehearsals and the final performance, I saw Megan grow in her self-confidence as she came alive in amazing ways. Through this one opportunity to share her hidden giftedness, Megan discovered her sense of worth and potential as she risked being foolish for something she yearned to experience and feel in her life.

I think this is what the Apostle Paul was inviting the new Christians in Corinth to recognize. The abundance in their lives could be experienced as they risked being foolish as they proclaimed the cross as the power of life that God was making possible through the resurrection of Christ. Living a message that seemed foolish was the way for others to encounter this new and abundant life in Christ.

That same invitation continues for us today. The power of the paradox depends on how we choose to respond. I hope we are willing to risk being foolish for Christ, because that is how lives are changed.

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Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Monday, March 4, 2024

Sacred Calling

By Katie Harmon-McLaughlin, director of Formation Ministries

[Excerpted from “A Hopeful Future Awaits,” Jan/Feb 2024 *Herald*, pp. 37–38]

The Lord is exalted; he dwells on high; he filled Zion with justice and righteousness; he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure.

—Isaiah 33:5–6

I recall moments in my life of being led by the Spirit, feeling the movements of a deeper call at work. I, too, have been led into wilderness moments, times of unsettling clarifying of who I really am and what matters most. I was a teenager when I first remember feeling that agitating and inviting Spirit at work within me so strongly one night that I walked away from my close group of friends to stand at the edge of the lake at my home campground. There was a strong wind upon the waters, and I stepped into a brave solitude I had not fully known before. It was me and God, and I stated my desire to be who God needed me to be in the world.

Sometimes we need to step away, into whatever wilderness is summoning, to get clear about who we really are and what the Spirit is inviting of our sacred lives. The quality of that experience for me was longing and a little fear and trembling. *I want this, but am I ready to be “alone with God” and risk becoming who God is calling me to be?* On the other side of the natural hesitation is a hopeful future beckoning, because within the calling is God's deep vision for all creation coming more fully into expression.

As we are reminded in Doctrine and Covenants 164:9b:

The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your whole-hearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God's covenant of peace in Jesus Christ.

Each time any one of us, within the context of our own life, chooses to say yes to that sacred calling, more of the fullness of God's vision is realized and expressed. We model the pattern of Jesus when we enter the wilderness, when we listen to the Spirit that leads us to the place we desire most to go even though we may resist.

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Return

[From “Lenten Reflection,” Mar/Apr 2022 *Herald*, p. 29]

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

—Mark 2:20

Wherever you find yourself,
Wherever you are,
Whatever condition you are in,
Return is always possible.

There is never not a way back—
Back to God,
Back to who you really are,
Back to the calling that is still aflame
Even now
In your depths.

Sometimes return
Is the way
Opening before you.

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Sacred Creation

By Gary Barnett of Longmont, Colorado, USA

Depart from evil, and do good; so you shall abide forever. For the Lord loves justice; he will not forsake his faithful ones.

—Psalm 37:27–28

Creator, God of seeing, God of love, God of peace,
Renew that spark of love you planted within us, Lord; the ember which will help us seek wholeness for our neighbors and our world, rather than the fragmentation we have built upon our differences.

Remind us, God of love, of our common traits—of those characteristics we all share—of those qualities which form our common humanity. When we are faced with an evil so terrible we cannot understand it, remind us we were not created out of your hatred, but as an act of your love. Remind us, God, that just as we have evolved as humans, so has our ability to hate. But remind us from time to time, that just as hatred has grown so, too, can love grow.

God, it is so hard at times to fan that spark of compassion for others that you planted within us. This is especially true when we witness extreme violence. We are so quick to build walls of self-preservation around us and to seek vengeance rather than justice—so very quick. But, God, what I ask today is that you comfort those who have suffered and continue to suffer. I ask that you help us to pause and reflect, rather than to lash out at innocents as we seek to punish the guilty.

Help us to remove the clutter in our lives and to listen for your voice as we wrestle with this unsettling violence, God. Call to our minds, Creator, that you designed us to be in relationships with others. We are all part of your sacred creation.

We pray in the name of Jesus, the one whom we call the Prince of Peace.
Amen.

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Thursday, March 7, 2024

Forgiveness Matters

By Kris Judd of Des Moines, Iowa, USA

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

—Jeremiah 29:7

Friday morning started out well but by noon was full of bad news; unnecessary appointments and frustrations and freezing rain made my drive home a challenge. A long line formed in the drive-thru lane, but I wanted to treat myself so decided I could wait a few minutes. The line of cars moved forward very slowly. Urgent texts and emails continued to beg my attention, and my anxiety was growing. I was trapped in the lane for seven minutes before placing my small order. The cars before me inched forward until 10 minutes later I reached the window. The young girl offered a quick apology for my wait. Ordinarily, I would have accepted that with grace and made a joke to lighten the mood. But that day I surprised myself with a curt response. When she gave me my chips, I rudely handed them back insisting the “hot” chips were anything but.

Her manager heard my frustration, stepped in, and gave me a fresh, hot order and an apology. I shared my surprising reaction with a few who know me well. They tried to assure me I had every right to be frustrated, even angry. But I was not assured. I was uncomfortable and embarrassed by my reactions. The Holy Spirit was convicting me that repentance was needed for my sake at the very least.

Monday afternoon I drove to the restaurant and bravely entered. I spotted the same young woman behind the counter, and when our eyes met, I motioned that I needed to talk with her. When I began to offer an apology, she appeared to remember the incident. “Oh, yeah, the hot chips,” she said, which let me know it had bothered her as well. I apologized for my rudeness and indicated it had been a rough morning. She apologized and shared that hers had been as well. We smiled, shook hands, and thanked each other.

It would have been easy to convince myself that my reaction was not only reasonable, but that it didn’t matter in the long run. But it did matter, to me and to the young woman who served me. And offering an apology and receiving forgiveness mattered even more, for in this young woman’s welfare resides my own.

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Friday, March 8, 2024

Barriers

By Shandra Newcom, Council of Twelve Apostles

[Excerpted from “Living Our Call,” Mar/Apr 2023 *Herald*, p. 24]

Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the gentiles.

—Matthew 12:18

We are a people of God, and we can bring prophetic love into the world. But something holds us back. Too often, we have set courage aside for comfort and the known. We will not be held back forever.

Our call as Christ-followers is to be in the unknown. Our call is to become lovers of the world—so much so that we will open our hearts every day to the pain and suffering we see. In doing so, we will listen, provide care, use our voice for love, and work to make a radical difference.

We will awaken, risk, and bless—walking with God, who breathes through us, who is in us, among us, and ahead of us.

If we will walk this path together, showing courage on the way, not wasting our breath but speaking Christ’s message in the face of discord and pain; if we will be prophetic in our imagination and pastoral in our care; if we will listen, discerning the heart of God, then we will live into our call to be journeyers for Christ.

We will walk home, into the heart of God. We may fall many times, but we still get up. We will live lives of newness, of radical love, of resurrection. We will become who we are called to become.

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Saturday, March 9, 2024

The Golden Rule

By Vincent Lewis of West Des Moines, Iowa, USA

[Excerpted from “When Will You Act?” Jan/Feb 2024 *Herald*, p. 27]

Oneness and equality in Christ do not mean uniformity. They mean Unity in Diversity and relating in Christ-like love to the circumstances of others as if they were one’s own. They also mean full opportunity for people to experience human worth and related rights, including expressing God-given giftedness in the church and society.

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:3e

The reality is, peace and justice for all is not a complicated task. Everyone has the ability to be an instrument of peace in their community and the world. Everyone also has the ability to perpetuate hate and injustice in their community and the world.

Being an instrument of peace and justice is not labor intensive. It does not require a high school diploma or college degree, that you be a certain age, or have a certain amount of income.

It requires only that we live our gospel, that we recognize God values every person on Earth and gave God’s only begotten Son for all of us. We are called to see the value in all our brothers and sisters.

One way to show we value all our brothers and sisters is to practice the Golden Rule: treat one another as we desire to be treated.

Our young people tell us they do not want to live in a world full of hate and disdain. They do not want to live in a world with systemic injustice. Older adults tell us they are sick and tired of living in a world filled with hate, disdain, and systemic injustice. The church tell us it is time to do more than just read about Unity in Diversity, sing about Unity in Diversity, and memorize our Enduring Principles.

It is time that we begin to live our Enduring Principles. We do this by demonstrating/living our belief in the Worth of All Persons.

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Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Sunday, March 10, 2024, *Fourth Sunday in Lent*

A Grace-filled Way of Life

By Susan Oxley of Seattle, Washington USA

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

—Ephesians 2:8–10

In mid-afternoon on February 9, 2023, I was leaving a local dog park with my daughter's golden retriever Rosie on a leash. Rosie caught sight of an approaching dog and took off enthusiastically. She pulled me off my feet, and in the fall, I broke both bones in my left arm.

Hospitalization, surgery, and a cast were the beginning of my healing process. When the cast came off, my hand and wrist were weak, sore, and immovable. The hand therapist assigned me simple exercises like bending my wrist, wiggling my fingers, and touching my thumb to each finger. I was to repeat them ten times every two hours.

Each movement caused pain. Bending and flexing felt like trying to bend wooden planks. Progress was minimal, and the first few days showed no improvement. But I did the hard work of keeping up with the exercises, averaging six repetitions every day. As my hand became more flexible and mobile, the therapist added strengthening exercises. After two months, flexibility and range of motion were almost fully restored.

So what brought about my healing? My dedication to the hard work of painful exercises? Or the gracious gift of healing provided by God's Spirit? Obviously, both played a role, but my exercises would have been useless without the gift of healing that God provided.

Our spiritual lives are similar. Are we saved by grace or works? God takes the initiative, healing our brokenness and restoring new life as a gift of grace. But we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works." Our response to God's free gift of grace is to develop a grace-filled way of life. We extend grace to others as an extension of Christ's presence in us. Our good works are the evidence that Christ lives in us and moves through our actions to bless others. It takes dedication, discipline, and hard work. But the result is joy in Christ and assurance that we are using God's gift of grace as intended.

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Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Monday, March 11, 2024

Say “Yes”

By Brenda Senga of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada

Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.

—Isaiah 60:18

The street outside my window is filled
with the rush of cars, their noisy engines
propel them in opposing directions
with equal measure of hurry
as if, for each, there is an unseen fire
somewhere that only that one driver can put out.

I have pulled myself out of the hustle
today, I have crawled out from
the jaws of the beast,
refusing to be devoured.

The ache that runs through my body, the piercing
In my skull, the awful pressure in my throat
like two angry hands, pushing, are evidence
that I barely survived. My eyes throb,
there is a stabbing in my right side,
This is the violence of our day—to abuse
both earth and body
in our relentless pursuit of productivity.

The thirst for output that refuses to be slaked
Has indeed given us more—
more anxiety
more fear
more pollution

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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so much more...

Today I want less, I push pause
on the crazy, frenetic rush, I enter
into my own slice of Sabbath, I tend
to my aching bones with loving care.

I want to see what is real in this world,
My eyes long to be healed by the vision
of the rose unfurling toward the sun.

My body asks to be rocked and soothed
by the ocean’s cool embrace, my bones beg
the soft give of soil rather than
the harshness of pavement, my skin thirsts
for canyon breezes and dappled light
instead of conditioned air and fluorescent tubes.

And today I say yes to my longings
I say yes to rest, yes to wild, yes to free.

Today I say yes to—Love.
So that I might find again
what is real in this world.

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Transformational Generosity

[From *Choose Generosity: Discovering Whole-Life Stewardship*, Herald House, p. 76]

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

—Romans 12:17–18

“Sharing the peace of Jesus Christ involves generously and compassionately offering witness, ministry, sacraments, and community life that reconciles and restores people to right or righteous relationships with God, themselves, others, and creation. This holistic approach to proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel is faithful to our best understanding of God’s will” (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 4th Edition, p. 14).

As whole-life stewards, we strive to share the peace of Jesus Christ through every facet of our lives and support others in doing the same. This involves generously sharing our tithing of time, talents, treasures, and testimonies.

“Tithing as a spiritual-growth discipline deepens our relationship with Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God’s grace and generosity. The more we deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ, the more we desire to support Christ’s mission every way we can. The more we support Christ’s mission every way we can, the more we are responding to the ministry of Jesus Christ” (President Steve Veazey, “Generosity and Sharing,” Part 1, January 2016 *Herald*).

Our generous sharing, dedicated to fulfilling God’s glorious purposes on Earth, fills us with abiding joy and enduring meaning. Our generosity releases Christ’s mission to touch many lives around the world. Faithful disciples do not just initiate acts of generosity, they anticipate the transformative effect of those acts. Uncommon generosity changes people, changes communities, and changes the world.

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Embrace and Release

[Excerpted from *Following the Spirit: Calling, Hope and Possibility*, Herald House, 2019, pp. 5–6]

Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit and you shall have peace in me.

—Doctrine and Covenants 18:2n

Amid the challenges of being a global community across diverse cultures and the rapidly shifting cultural and religious landscape in some fields of the church, it is easy to feel discouraged. In his September 2017 address, “A Time to Act!,” President Steve Veazey shared: “The word of calling, hope, and possibility emerges from the reality that great change is happening in the world. And the rate of change is accelerating. This change includes how people view God, culture, finances, technology, politics, and religious institutions. The word of calling, hope, and possibility is that new ways of understanding, communicating, and living the gospel in response to changing circumstances already are happening in Community of Christ. The church’s future is related directly to our willingness to go where the Spirit is calling us to go.”

“Our divinely led faith adventure with God is eventful, challenging, and surprising, and we are poised to fulfill God’s ultimate vision for the church” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:9a, adapted).

Awakening to the Spirit promises risk and blessing. Responding faithfully to the Spirit’s impulse challenges us to consider more deeply what we embrace and what we release as we journey forward.

The future church is being formed by a basic concept: Our chief purpose is to birth, nurture, and multiply communities of disciples and seekers engaged in spiritual formation and compassionate ministry and action. This basic blueprint—spiritual formation, community, compassionate ministry, and action—is true to the vision of Christ.

The blessing of this journey is not in determining the answers, but in following the Spirit more deeply into the questions and possibilities. As you engage...rest in God’s love and presence, journey with openness, pay attention to what stirs within you, and let the Spirit breathe.

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Thursday, March 14, 2024

Imperfections

By David Brock of Redmond, Oregon, USA

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

—Psalm 121:1–2

There are no obvious reasons to look forward to Lent. We begin with ashes and end with the Last Supper. In the between-time we're invited to ponder dust and walk in wild, dangerous, desert landscapes. We're invited to face our mortality and our weakness. Frankly, few of us would choose Lent. Most of us have to be driven into it, just as Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit after his baptism.

I don't get to the vulnerability of Lent's invitation without a fight—without strong resistance. Give up something for Lent. Give up an addiction: coffee, CNN, this month's Top 40 countdown, Facebook, impatience. "Oh, yes," I say, "I'm not going to trivialize Lent by just giving up chocolate. It means so much more." Well, yes, it does, Dave, but don't use your non-trivialization to sophisticatedly rationalize your way around giving up a habit bordering on addiction! Lent does nudge, push, even drive us to give something up!

And maybe those 40 days of "giving up," of fasting or surrendering power or confidence, or confessing, "I can't be this; I can't do this on my own" will alter something at my core...forever. Maybe that is what I dislike most about Lent. Maybe that is why I have to be driven to it, rather than politely invited.

Lent is primarily about dislocation. It is about the inability to go on with business as usual. Here's the unwelcome truth. The God of immeasurable love and mercy and acceptance is most often made real to us in our weakness and in our flaws and in the displeasure with our unpleasant self. In our imperfection, Richard Rohr says, "the cross of failure becomes the catapult toward transformation" ("The Positive in the Negative," February 15, 2016).

Something is calling to be given up in you and me. It's hard. But, it is invitation—an invitation from the God of all creation, from the God who is revealed to us in Christ Jesus. The giving up gives place for the more—more life, more clarity about what matters most, more you and me—the genuine you and me.

Have we got the guts and the capacity to do that? Well, yes. With and in Christ, it is possible.

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Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

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Friday, March 15, 2024

Spilling Over

By Kevin White of West Branch, Michigan, USA

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.?

—1 Peter 3:8

Maker of all things,

Giver of life,

Commander of chaos,

Conductor of order,

Source of love,

Our souls sing to experience your fullness, and tremble in Your Being.

Open our eyes to witness your presence in and through all, that we might be in awe of our own existence.

May we be overwhelmed with gratitude, our spirits swollen with the undefinable knowledge of your reality.

As our hearts spill over, unable to contain the knowing, may it fall generously upon others that they too become aware of you.

Help us to see deeply, forgive gracefully, and to love thoroughly.

Guide us to opportunities to be your blessing of peace that heals brokenness and enlightens lives lost to darkness. Empower us with the courage to embrace the insecurities of our world and be a people of peace.

Prayer Phrase: "...I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ's community.

Saturday, March 16, 2024

God Is Here

By Jan Hill of New Brighton, Minnesota, USA

Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace, in peace because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock.

—Isaiah 26:3–4

Creation is sacred to me because in it, and through it, I experience God.

When I am awakened by the songs of the birds early on a June morning, while it is still dark and not even the first ray of dawn is visible, I know God as hope.

When I am lulled to sleep at night by the hum of the crickets, I know God as rest and regeneration.

When I sit by a campfire on a chilly evening, I know God as warmth, light, and focus.

When I hear the haunting call of the loon, I know God as ancient and mysterious.

When I see the patterns of the green leaves against the blue sky, I know God as beauty, balance, color, texture, and contrast.

When I hear the pounding rain, the raging wind, and the echoing boom of thunder, I know God as strength and might.

When I see the quiet, grazing doe and her fawns, I know God as gentle, peaceful, and serene.

When I see the green of summer turn to the blazing oranges and burgundies of autumn, and when I see the neutral colors of winter burst into the yellow-green buds of spring, I know God as faithful and trustworthy.

When I drive through the Midwest countryside in July and see the acres and acres of green corn, I know God as generous.

When I hold a grandchild in my arms, I know God as love and promise.

When I see the vast ocean against the far-off horizon and feel the waves lap against my toes in the sand, I know God as unknowable, yet present.

God is all that our senses can take in, and so much more!

If we experience creation as having our being in God, then creation is, indeed, sacred.

Prayer Phrase: "...I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ's community.

Sunday, March 17, 2024, *Fifth Sunday in Lent*

Written on Our Hearts

By Charmaine Chvala-Smith, Graceland University Seminary chaplain

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

—Jeremiah 31:33 NRSV

Do you remember learning to write? Steps moving us from meaningless scribbles to recognizable letters, then words, and eventually sentences wondrously communicating our thoughts to the world?

We “lefties” needed slightly different instructions than our right-handed classmates as we gripped our new pencils and tried to recreate the magical symbols on the board—shapes from which words were created! Exciting stuff for young learners, but as we engaged in the task, frustrating, too.

Do you remember those who, upon seeing our awkward or unreadable attempts, re-demonstrated the method or gently guided our hand through the unfamiliar movements until we could fashion them ourselves?

In a time of deep despair, the prophet Jeremiah tells Israel: “... I will write it on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33).

The Hebrew word translated as “heart” in English means “mind and will.” In this passage God takes up the task of writing, promising to engrave reminders in the people’s wills and minds. Reminders: God has not abandoned them; God is **for** them; they belong; and a verse later, God desires each person know God for themselves, so they can experience acceptance, love, and forgiveness.

As Lent leads us through Jesus’s ministry to the horrors of Good Friday, God’s promise to us in Christ is not different. Christ’s ministry and words, as well as his death and resurrection are reminders of these very same things. Jesus-followers today find these assurances inscribed on our “hearts,” too. How shall we employ them? Can we be young students again, learning to scribe God’s love into each day? Will we show others, longing for these letters of love, that God’s engravings are also on their hearts?

Obviously, practicing these words can be wearisome when aspects of culture tell us they, not God, determine our worth. But God writes with indelible ink. God gently takes our hand and traces and retraces these amazing revelations ever deeper into our lives.

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ’s community.

Monday, March 18, 2024

Hungry Hearts

By Anthony Chvala-Smith of Independence, Missouri, USA

[Excerpted from “The Kingdom in Our Heads,” Mar/Apr 2023 *Herald*, pp. 24–26]

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

—Psalm 51:10

Life is full of wilderness times. They often come unbidden. But in Lent we actually can choose the desert, hoping it has beneficial lessons. A famous desert monk, Antony of Egypt, said, “Without temptation no one can be saved.” In his context Antony meant that temptation reminds us we all need grace. I might put it this way, “Without deserts, no one can be saved.”

That’s because the privation of the desert opens us to the needy places in our souls, which we commonly ignore. Desert rations can show us what we’re truly made of, which turns out to be: *hunger*.

Many people in Jesus’s time hungered for a new day. They wanted Roman occupiers gone and a messiah who would violently expel them. This hoped-for Son of David would be freedom-fighter and monarch rolled into one. Everything would be made right; the glory days of Israel’s long-dead monarchy would return.

Hearts and minds are connected in our inner landscapes. A hungry heart sets the mind to conjuring endless fantasies that appear totally plausible. What the people in Jesus’ oppressed homeland yearned for is understandable. It’s no surprise, then, that Jesus’ temptations play off his people’s desires.

Jesus needed those forty days in the desert. It was a time of deep self-examination. Would he be what God wanted, or give in to the kind of reign some people fancied a real messiah should bring?

It’s a story not unlike our own. Who hasn’t been tempted by images born of a gnawing hunger within? What is it we want? What are they, these little kingdoms in our heads?

Jesus didn’t get to skip the desert [and] the liturgical calendar gives us space to imitate him with our own forty-day trip into the spiritual hinterlands. Here we can examine our hungry places and expose the latest kingdoms in our heads.

The goal is to let the kingdom Jesus embodied—the *real* kingdom—take new and deeper shape in our lives.

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ’s community.

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Without Blinders

By Michalina Bartlett of Gainesville, Florida, USA

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

—Colossians 1:19–20

After bounding from its crouch, the cat streaks into the chase with its gaze intent on the terrified mouse. The teeth of the mouse have a viselike clamp on the cheese. Nothing is more intimidating than the focus of a predator, and nothing more fear-driven than the escape of the hunted. And, between the two, there is nothing more narrow in vision than this interplay of pursuit and escape.

Myself, I want out of this mad race and into the peaceful contemplation of the Divine. Pondering the image of cat and mouse, I can see how much time I waste in competitive living. In the end, it succeeds in nothing but a selfish result. By being the winner, and perhaps being right—or the loser, and perhaps being wrong—both lose. Both are egoistic and shortsighted.

Why involve ourselves in this struggle at all? Hindered by the blinders a shortsighted goal creates for us, we can't see anything beyond what is before our faces: the need to control, be right, and win.

I would rather know I am reconciled to God and divine truth. This is a more expansive and creative way to live. I would choose to live without the blinders that ego pursuit and pride create. What would happen then? The more I consider the alternative, the more I see myself choosing Christ's peace. There are no losers in the pursuit of what matters most. There are only winners in Christ's mission of evangelism, compassionate ministries, and justice and peacemaking.

Prayer Phrase: "...I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ's community.

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Connections

By Dale Ward of Des Moines, Iowa, USA

[Adapted from “Answer the Call,” Jan/Feb 2024 *Herald*, p. 40]

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

—Isaiah 30:18

“Hello, Poppo,” squawked the walkie-talkie in my hand.

“Hello, Ollie,” I answered back to the rear of the campervan. And, as one does with a three-year-old, we repeated that interaction several times. We didn’t say much after hello—that wasn’t important.

What was important (and fun for a grandpa) was the connection. What mattered was not what was said but that we each had a buddy on the other end of the line. A buddy that we could reach out to anytime and know they were there.

The walkie-talkies reminded me a bit of our job as disciples of Christ. We are called to be the “hello” at the other end of the line for people seeking community. We are called to press the talk button and reach out to those who might be looking for a community.

I also think it means we need to be ready to answer the walkie-talkie call from anyone we meet. We need to be ready to share the reason for hope we find in Christ. Press the talk button and invite someone you know to church.

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ’s community.

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Imagine

By Ronald Heinze of Española, New Mexico, USA

Lift up your eyes and fix them on the place beyond the horizon to which you are sent. Journey in trust, assured that the great and marvelous work is for this time and for all time.

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:1a

I sit quietly excusing myself from thoughts that cloud my mind. I can almost hear the snow falling and wild turkeys scratching for food. I see nothing, I think nothing, I feel God surrounding me. I imagine the world is at my fingertips. I imagine peace, I imagine love. I imagine I have the power to bring peace and love everywhere. I believe the world is transforming. Everyone around me is rejoicing in peace. My town, my state, my nation, and all nations are rejoicing in love and peace... just by my thoughts.

Prayer Phrase: "...I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ's community.

Friday, March 22, 2024 (World Water Day)

Living Water

By Susan Oxley of Seattle, Washington, USA

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

—Romans 8:28

The day was coming to an end, and I was feeling good about the successful completion of a number of projects. Everything had gone well. So why was I developing a headache, fuzzy in my thinking, feel poorly? Had I eaten something that didn't agree with me? No, I had eaten light, healthy food.

Then I realized I had been too busy to stop and drink any water. With decreased water, there's decreased fluid to carry oxygen to the brain. Thought processes slow down. Water is vital to the overall health of every system. Without water, the human body soon begins to shut down. You can live without food for a few weeks. You can live without water for only a few days. But the solution is so simple: clean, fresh water. I drank a large glass of water. Within an hour, my headache was gone, and I was feeling great.

I'm very blessed. I live in a part of the world where clean water is easily accessible, pollutants are filtered out, and poor sanitation doesn't contaminate the water system with disease. There are many people who are not so fortunate. Simply obtaining water of any kind can require trudging to a distant river and carrying it back in jugs. Often there are no resources for purifying the water. Sanitation practices add to the dangers of drinking from polluted streams or ponds.

One of our Mission Initiatives is to Abolish Poverty, End Needless Suffering. The UN has declared March 22 World Water Day to bring attention to the needs of people without access to clean water and good sanitation. We can help by supporting organizations like Outreach International and World Accord that are assisting people to obtain clean, pure drinking water. We can stand up for the people who live near factories that pollute their water systems. We can advocate for good sanitation systems, monitored and managed equitably for the good of all people, not just some.

Each time you drink a glass of pure water, recommit to making a difference in the life of someone else. Let's make clean, clear water available for all.

Prayer Phrase: "...I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ's community.

Saturday, March 23, 2024

All the Way to the Cross

By Steve Veazey, president of Community of Christ

[Excerpted from “Be a Donkey for Jesus,” Mar/Apr 2020 *Herald*, p. 21]

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near...

—Isaiah 55:6

I’ve heard a lot of Palm Sunday services. But one of the most memorable is a sermon I heard when I was serving as apostle in Africa.

After a series of long flights that took most of three days, I finally arrived in Chingola, Zambia. Though fatigued, I decided to attend the church services that night at a local congregation.

The lively singing and dancing kept me awake, but when the preaching started, I began to feel the effects of jet lag. I focused on the speaker, although I did not understand his language.

As the speaker preached, he became more animated and passionate. Sitting next to me was my friend, Bunda Chibwe. Bunda began to chuckle, and then a deep laugh rumbled from him. I asked what the preacher was talking about.

“Well, my friend, he is telling the story of Palm Sunday and about Jesus riding the donkey into Jerusalem like a king.” I thought that was all very well, but not necessarily funny, so I asked, “What is so humorous?”

“Well, my friend, the main point of his sermon is that we should all be donkeys for Jesus and take him wherever he needs to go!”

That struck me as funny and a great point at the same time. As disciples of Jesus, are we content to be in the crowd of well-wishers cheering him on, or are we committed to going with him all the way to the cross and beyond?

As disciples of Jesus, are we willing to take the message and vision of Jesus to the places and into the lives of those who most desperately need his ministry of compassionate hope and healing?

Now that I think about it, the preacher was right: We are all called to do what we can to get Jesus where he is needed most!

Prayer Phrase: “...I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Spiritual Practice: Open Hands

Stand or sit with your hands extended in front of you. Prayerfully ponder all that you hold in your hands that make you feel too full, busy, drained, or closed. Spread your hands up and apart to release these burdens; then hold them open and empty them again. Thank God for relationships that fill and feed your spirit. Pray for a generous heart and open hands that reach out to make room for all in the circle of Christ’s community.

Sunday, March 24, 2024, *Palm Sunday*

Join the Humble Procession

By Tammy Lindle Lewis of Renton, Washington, USA

Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who

followed were shouting,

“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!”

—Mark 11:7–10

Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem is a familiar story. I picture a large, loud street party whenever I think of the events of Palm Sunday. Jesus rides alone; he’s a one-person parade. He is the sole focus—considering the size and behavior of the assembled crowd—in a grand spectacle. This image of his triumphal entry contrasts sharply with the invitation of today’s worship theme “Join the Humble Procession.” Jesus made a grand entrance. At first glance, the only “humble” part of it appears to be Jesus, the Messiah, coming in peace riding a colt, rather than as a conqueror riding a horse. Of course, we—in our discipleship and actions—should join in sharing Christ’s peace.

A deeper reading of the scripture passage turns my focus to the crowd. They are not the stars of this show, yet they followed Jesus, and some went ahead of him. They waved palm fronds and shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” Shouting and waving are also not how I would describe “humble.”

We read that many in the crowd spread their cloaks on the road ahead of where Jesus was to go. This part of the story is not often adequately portrayed in the Palm Sunday recreations I’ve witnessed. Typically, costumed children wave palm fronds, walk timidly down the aisle, and uncomfortably proclaim their “hosannas” while the congregation politely watches. I’ve never once seen a recreation that entails people laying down their garments to capture the spectacular entrance of what we read in the scripture passage.

These often-overlooked actions—laying down their cloaks ahead of Jesus—are humble gestures. The act showed honor and caring for Jesus in the only way some could. Offering something personal to care for and honor another *is* an act of humility. Sharing our gifts of time, talent, treasure, and testimony to show honor and caring for another are acts of discipleship. This is a humble procession which we can join.

Prayer Phrase: “...in your presence there is fullness of joy...” (Psalm 16:11).

Spiritual Practice: Time with God

Sit quietly and let your breathing become calm and deep. Ask God’s Spirit to rest on you. See or sense the Spirit anointing you in the form of light, a dove, wind, color, or other images that might come. Ask to become aware of God’s love. Listen to the ways in which God wants to flow from your heart as living water. Give thanks that your name is “beloved,” that our name is Community of Christ.

Monday, March 25, 2024

Love Springs Forth

By Jewell Bolton of Leicester, England

Therefore God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

—Philippians 2:9-11

Dear Creator,

Slowly, hesitantly the knowledge of your presence in our lives begins to dawn. We open the eyes of our soul and see your all-encompassing compassion and healing love. A morning of hope is brightening.

We leave behind our refusals, our grumpiness, our badmouthing of neighbors, our deep festering hurts, our resentments, our failed dreams. We cast these down! We let them go...and feel the tingle in the breath of freedom.

And hark! What is coming? The sight of a Savior. Oh, my God! Our Savior is riding on a donkey with dusty feet. Oh Hosanna, my Lord! You are coming in this morning of renewal.

We rise! We come...to worship you! Hosanna!

Your face turns to love us. We bow inside our souls as we realize you know us. You understand us as we are. You touch our brokenness and cleanse. We connect with your Spirit.

We move! Love springs forth from our hearts! Kindness is the daily message of our mouths. Faith permeates our souls. We feel the anointing of our heads with the conviction of your amazing, *amazing* grace.

Amen.

Prayer Phrase: "...in your presence there is fullness of joy..." (Psalm 16:11).

Spiritual Practice: Time with God

Sit quietly and let your breathing become calm and deep. Ask God's Spirit to rest on you. See or sense the Spirit anointing you in the form of light, a dove, wind, color, or other images that might come. Ask to become aware of God's love. Listen to the ways in which God wants to flow from your heart as living water. Give thanks that your name is "beloved," that our name is Community of Christ.

Tuesday, March 26, 2024

Forever Changed

By Joseph Andrews of Blue Springs, Missouri, USA

If you truly would be Community of Christ, then embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ.

—Doctrine and Covenants 164:9d

In the Christian calendar 40 days marks the period of Lent, which comes before the celebrations of Easter. This is a season of reflection and preparation, often identified by fasting from food and other things. Only a small number of people today fast for the whole of Lent, although some maintain the practice on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. By observing Lent, Christians replicate Jesus' sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days.

Where Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus after his death on the cross, Lent recalls the events leading up to and including Jesus' crucifixion by the Romans. But we ask, why 40 days? It turns out 40 is a significant number in Jewish-Christian scripture: in Genesis the flood which destroyed the Earth came about by 40 days and nights of rain. The Hebrews spent 40 years in the wilderness before reaching the land promised to them by God. Moses fasted 40 days before receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry. Both Eastern and Western churches observe Lent, but the 40 days are counted differently. The Western church excludes Sundays, which are celebrated as the day of Christ's resurrection. The Eastern church includes Sundays. These churches also start Lent on different days. Western churches start Lent on the seventh Wednesday before Easter (called Ash Wednesday). Eastern churches start Lent on Monday of the seventh week before Easter and end it nine days before Easter. Eastern churches call this period the "Great Lent."

Certain feelings and concepts come to mind as we move into Passion Week. I am caught up in the crowd's joy, the sorrow, the pain, the hurtful events, unimaginable cruelty. I am touched each time I read these passages. The events of Passion Week represent the ultimate gift of love. The Lenten season provides an invitation for us to remember well this story that makes a huge difference in our lives. As we move through the mystery of this week and consider deeply all that transpired with our Lord and Savior for our sake, our lives will change. Mine will never be the same again.

Prayer Phrase: "...in your presence there is fullness of joy..." (Psalm 16:11).

Spiritual Practice: Time with God

Sit quietly and let your breathing become calm and deep. Ask God's Spirit to rest on you. See or sense the Spirit anointing you in the form of light, a dove, wind, color, or other images that might come. Ask to become aware of God's love. Listen to the ways in which God wants to flow from your heart as living water. Give thanks that your name is "beloved," that our name is Community of Christ.

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Astonishing Generosity

[From *Choose Generosity: Discovering Whole-Life Stewardship*, p. 24]

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

—John 12:3

No expression of grace and generosity is as complete as the life of Jesus, God's Son freely given to all. As Jesus' life and ministry showed, God's grace and love are equally available to everyone. God's love is unwavering and not dependent on good behavior.

The gift of God's Son shows God's grace and love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16–17). "Grace" expresses God's gift of eternal life and commitment to save the world.

God's astonishing generosity in the life of Jesus is the ultimate example of generosity. God loved us, and we love in response to being loved. We become whole when we receive God's gift of Jesus Christ realizing that all we are and have is from God, who gives freely with no strings attached.

Prayer Phrase: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes..." (Revelation 21:4).

Spiritual Practice: Fragrance

Remember or find a way to experience directly a fragrance you enjoy (fresh flowers, candle, fresh bread, pine trees, sea air, spices). Ask God to help you discern a situation which calls you to bring reconciliation and healing. Pray that you might spread the peace of Christ as fragrantly and generously as the aroma you now experience.

Thursday, March 28, 2024, *Maundy Thursday*

On the Wings of Prayer

By Diana Ytell of Ozark, Missouri, USA

I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

—Psalm 116:1–2

O God,

As we prepare to walk the journey to the cross with you, we bow before you again this day and express our gratitude for the generous gifts you provide for us daily. Help us to focus more clearly on your entry into Jerusalem and the events that unfolded during the last weeks of your earthly life.

We thank you for the plan you have for the salvation of your children. We praise you for the gift of your great faithfulness; for the knowledge that the Holy Spirit surrounds us all our days as you walk with us through the sunshine of your love, through the shadow of death, and as we sleep and dream in the gentle darkness you have created.

We have heard the cries of your people (here at home, as well as around our world) as they struggle with the overwhelming sense of grief and the pain of losing loved ones, with the consequences of economic crises, the loss of hope and a sense of discouragement.

We thank you for your great mercy. You come to us in our brokenness and bring peace to our chaotic lives and hope to our doubting minds. You offer us forgiveness when we come to you with a contrite spirit and a broken heart. You embrace us in your arms of warmth and love, you feed us with the bread of your broken body, and you pour living water upon our weary souls.

We have laid our hearts open at the foot of your cross. Grant us a desire to be a people of peace, a gentle people, born anew from our deepest sorrow through your forgiveness and your great sacrifice.

You have refreshed our souls for we have stood in the presence of the Holy. Let your people hear your still small voice that comes above the chaos on the wings of prayer and calls us to be a people of peace.

You have raised our spirits to new life. Strengthen us and send us forth in a spirit of compassion to love and serve each other. Amen.

Prayer Phrase: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes...” (Revelation 21:4).

Spiritual Practice: Healing for Broken Spirits

Begin with quiet prayer. Ask God to help you detect some “sore places” in the body of Christ and God’s creation. Become aware of people who feel separated, wounded, or left out. Reflect on or write a short journal entry of healing words to at least one person who comes to mind. Ask God for words that will touch this person’s broken spirit like healing ointment. Keep this person in your heart and prayers today and act on any ideas that come to bring blessing and wholeness.

Friday, March 29, 2024, *Good Friday*

I'm Thirsty

By Brittany Longsdorf of Brighton, Massachusetts, USA

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases, yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was sounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

—Isaiah 53:4–5

A lovely ecumenical tradition that many college chapels and churches offer every year on Good Friday is a service centered on the last words of Christ. In the different gospel narratives these seven pronouncements cover several topics including forgiveness (Luke 23:34), hope for reunion in paradise (Luke 23:43), and deep theological questioning (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34).

Perhaps the phrase that always tugs at my heart the most is “I’m thirsty.” The phrase uttered by an exhausted Jesus in the Gospel of John comes just after Jesus connects his communities, his mother, and family to his disciples, and just before his final breath of release, uttering, “It is finished.” “I’m thirsty” reveals to us the full embodiment of Christ; it shows us how very human his body truly is. His basic needs to be fed, watered, comforted are the same as our needs. This primordial desire to be quenched of thirst, cried from the cross by Jesus, connects our very bodies to his in a profound way.

Barbara Brown Taylor in her book *An Altar in the World* talks about the practice of wearing skin: how our very basic bodily struggles and needs connect us to one another—connect us to all of humanity. Taylor writes that wearing skin, “is what we have most in common with one another” (42). Before the mystery and divinity of the Resurrection, Jesus is fully in his skin as a hurting, thirsty member of the human family. He is in common with us; we are a part of one bodily communion. This Good Friday, “I’m thirsty” reminds us that Jesus is not simply for us but is with us. Together we share in the work of the world and the call to bring hope, peace, and equality to all.

Prayer Phrase: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes...” (Revelation 21:4).

Spiritual Practice: Healing for Broken Spirits

Begin with quiet prayer. Ask God to help you detect some “sore places” in the body of Christ and God’s creation. Become aware of people who feel separated, wounded, or left out. Reflect on or write a short journal entry of healing words to at least one person who comes to mind. Ask God for words that will touch this person’s broken spirit like healing ointment. Keep this person in your heart and prayers today and act on any ideas that come to bring blessing and wholeness.

Saturday, March 30, 2024, *Holy Saturday*

Waiting with Courage

By Karin Peter, president of seventy

[Excerpted from “Dismay Uttered, Pain Held, Prayers Offered,” Mar/Apr 2023 *Herald*, pp. 26–27]

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

—John 19:40

On this [Holy Saturday] we return to the wilderness of Lent to spend time contemplating, confessing, hoping. It is here, in the non-yet of the coming Resurrection, that we make time and space to express the fears and frustrations that hover in the background of our human experience. We acknowledge our vulnerability, our loneliness, our less-than-kind reactions and inactions.

As we wait, we reflect on the persecution Christ suffered. We examine our own lives and recognize that as Christ followers, we are called to live courageously as a counter to the hatred, consumerism, division, idolatry, and fear of our surrounding cultures.

We are uncertain about the future of congregational life, dismayed over losing buildings and places we find sacred, and concerned about funding the continued mission of the church. Holy Saturday is a time to voice our concerns and laments. In doing so, we make space for the Spirit to do its work—the work of comfort, companionship, courage.

This is where we find ourselves as a community of faithful disciples. We are waiting with courage. Courage to resist cultural temptations that distract us from the quiet summoning of the Spirit. Courage to welcome what we cannot yet see, the dawn of liberating resurrection.

Prayer Phrase: “I came that they may have life...” (John 10:10).

Spiritual Practice: Weaving a Life

Hold, or imagine yourself holding, a piece of patterned cloth. Examine it carefully. Notice overlapping threads, mingling colors that form the design. Write a journal entry or meditate about the threads and patterns of your life. What design do you see? How does the life pattern you are weaving create justice and wholeness in God’s world? What new pattern is God calling you to weave?

Sunday, March 31, 2024, *Easter Sunday*

Cristo Vive/Christ Is Living

By David Brock of Redmond, Oregon, USA

Friends, let me go over the Message with you one final time—this Message that I proclaimed and that you made your own; this Message on which you took your stand and by which your life has been saved.

—1 Corinthians 15:1–2 The Message

When I can, I always ask members of my congregation to read the back of the bulletin each Sunday—even during the worship service. Sometimes they forget. I don't want them to miss out.

If you are reading this during Easter Sunday service, however, I change my weekly request to this:
Stop reading. Finish this later today.

This is Resurrection Day. This, like no other day, is the day of new life, new beginnings. A cross stands blooming in the chapel. “Alleluia, He is risen” music will soon be sounding. Ukrainian eggs might be there to marvel over. New dresses. New bonnets. Colorful cloth and candles. Words of life and hope from the scriptures. A fine preacher preaching. And through it all the pervading presence of the One who rose and who raises us again. Today.

If you are *still* reading this during the Easter worship, *Stop! Please!* Give yourself over to the people, the place, the words, this moment. Receive the message “on which you took your stand and by which your life has been saved.”

After the benediction and sending forth, you can read the following: Now that the 50 days of Easter have begun, now that we've received the Message, it is time to live and share the Message. The word, as a Christian leader wrote, is that the tomb can't hold Jesus. Jesus, the Christ, is still here among us, still recruiting people for the beloved community. “He's loose in the world.”

When I asked Adriana Betancourt in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, what the risen Christ meant to her, she said, “I would speak to you of a marvelous friend. I would tell you that you have a divine companion in life's journey. I would tell you that knowing him is the most marvelous experience that can happen in the life of a human being.”

As Community of Christ in Spain and Latin America declares on this Easter, so we all speak the Message:
“Cristo Vive! Christ is Living.”

Prayer Phrase: “I came that they may have life...” (John 10:10).

Spiritual Practice: Vessel for Living Water

Imagine or feel a vessel at the center of your being (a clay jar, a crystal vase, a metal bucket, or other container). Imagine reaching inside to draw something from the vessel to share with someone. As you reach inside, you find only a tiny pool of stagnant liquid. You are thirsty, dry, empty. Then something clear and cool begins to pour over you. It splashes and tumbles into the vessel, filling it to the brim. The living water of Christ pours on and in you. Your vessel fills and runs over, blessing your body and soul. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving and commitment to share living water with others.