

A Time for  
Everything

2023



Saint  
Francis  
Church

Lenten  
Devotional

Written by the community of St Francis Episcopal Church

# W elcome to the seventh annual Lenten Devotional Booklet.

*This year's theme is "A Time For Everything," inspired by Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.”

While some of the language may be a bit unpleasant – after all, who really wants there to be a time to give up or a time to refrain from embracing – if we sit with these words long enough, we recognize them as different stages of life ... stages each and every one of us will likely experience. And God is with us through every single one of these stages. Every moment, every season. May that truth resonate with you as you read this collection of reflections.

A special shout-out to our 7 (!! ) first-time contributors – Sharon Craig-Insalata, Shelly Crilly Benner, Richard Downie, David Knight, Val Valiquette, Angie Witt, and Hal Yee, Jr. —who said “Yes” to sharing a bit of their story with our parish family through their reflections! And of course my deepest thank you to my faithful network of writers who I could count on to contribute submissions again this year – your continued willingness to support this project is deeply appreciated. Thank you, Laurie Anderson, for applying your sharp editing skills to finetune the drafts, and many thanks to Susan Marshall, for putting all of our work together and “making it pretty”, and to Claire Erbeznik for printing and prepping hard copies.

There is indeed a time for everything, and it is now time to begin our Lenten journey! May God bless you with meaningful insights!

In God's Love,

Kristina Pelá

*Ministry Council Lead & Shepherd for Pastoral Care*

# Carving Out Devotional Time

**F**or starters, keep it simple!



The key is to place yourself in surroundings that afford you the mental space to just “be”. Perhaps it’s a ritual of lighting a candle and settling onto the couch or at a table with a journal; perhaps it’s outdoors, taking a walk or sitting in your garden; perhaps you can center yourself during your commute, or perhaps you stay in bed when you first arise and delve into the scriptures right away. Explore what works best for you.

Invite the Holy Spirit to be a part of your devotional time, praying from your heart or using a prepared prayer such as this:

*Dear God,  
Quiet my heart so that I may be still before You.  
Fill me with Your presence,  
and let Your Word  
and the reflections of Your people  
help me to hear Your voice.*

Read through the day’s scriptures slowly and deliberately, taking note of what words, phrases or images resonate with you. You may choose to journal or make notations in your Lenten Booklet. Read through the scriptures a second time, again noticing what catches your attention. Finish with the writer’s reflection.

Consider why certain phrases catch your attention and how they might be relevant to your present circumstances. Allow God’s Word and your thoughts to “marinate,” and trust that the Spirit is working during your devotional time and beyond.

May your devotional time fill you and be a time of discovery!

In God’s Love,

Kristina Pelá,  
*Ministry Council Lead & Shepherd for Pastoral Care*

# Ash Wednesday, February 22

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Jonah 3:1-4:11, Psalm 95, Heb 12:1-14, Luke 18:9-14

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*“... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us ...”*  
Hebrews 12:1

I love the image of “throwing off everything that hinders” and, freed from the weight of said hindrances, being able to run gracefully, unencumbered. What if we were to extend this concept to govern how we set out to live each day? Can we disentangle ourselves from that which hinders us from living our best lives?

I can say with 100% certainty I will never complete a marathon in one day – 26 miles is far too overwhelming for someone like me, who is not a runner. But I’m pretty sure I could run a quarter mile today if necessary. And if I were to run a quarter mile each week, or once a month, eventually, those quarter miles would add up to the length of a marathon. Even if I were to skip a day (or a week or a month), as long as I would return to the course, eventually I’d complete 26 miles. The same holds true for whatever hindrances weigh us down in our lives. We may successfully throw them off for a while, but sometimes we fall back into unhealthy patterns. But that doesn’t mean we should quit the race -- we just need to get back on track!

Today is Ash Wednesday, marking the beginning of Lent, a season to be particularly intentional about focusing on Christ’s life, ministry, and sacrifice. Welcome to your “quarter mile.” During this segment of “the race marked out for you,” I invite you to consider what is holding you back from living your best life. Is it the habit of holding on to Resentment? Regret? Self-Pity? Guilt? Fear? Anger? Unforgiveness, because you know you’re right? Or is it procrastination, because you don’t want to face uncomfortable feelings or discussions?

As with many obstacles in life, facing them with someone often makes them easier to overcome. I encourage you to invite Christ to be your “running partner”. Together, discern what is hindering you from living your best life, and then move forward by addressing it, one step at a time



*Kristina Pelá and her husband Fabrizio have been St. Francis’ parishioners for more than 20 years. Kristina serves as Ministry Council Lead and Shepherd for Pastoral Care, and relishes serving as Chalice Bearer, Layreader and Intercessory Prayer during 10:00 services.*

# Thursday, February 23

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Deut 7:6-11, Psalm 37, Titus 1:1-16, John 1:29-34

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*“Trust in the Lord and do good ...”* Psalm 37:3

Have you had your credit card used for “unauthorized charges?” Many of us have checked our bank balances and found that someone, somehow, has hacked into our financial information and used our card in an “unauthorized” way. Aaaaghhh! We can only scream when we have not left the South Bay for days but find our card used at a restaurant in San Diego or a spa in Orange County. This happened to me the day after Christmas and I was furious, angry at myself and confused about how this could happen to me, an honest and careful steward of my resources. Fortunately, a call with the fraud department at Bank of America stopped this illicit activity and promised a refund of the disputed charges. Gradually my anger calmed down.

The scriptures for today concentrate on how to confront evil in the world without giving up our faith. The past year, 2022, afforded plenty of moments of outrage: anger at politicians who ignore the needs of the people to advance their own goals, anger at our widespread neglect of the planet, and continuing anger at a plague that hasn’t disappeared and keeps interrupting our plans. And then there are those irksome situations that will not show up in a newspaper but make our blood boil: the credit card hack, the rudeness of a colleague, the insensitivity of a friend. What do we do when we are really mad?

Psalm 37, composed over two thousand years ago, reflects this problem. The Psalmist writes, *“Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers....Refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil.”* Fortunately, this psalm also gives us a solution, and it’s one we can all follow. *“Trust in the Lord and do good...”* If we remember that evil perishes but good endures, we may be able to handle those “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (as Shakespeare says) that come our way. It is rarely easy to turn away from wrath and embrace the good that the Lord promises He will provide, but the Psalmist asks us to remember that *“the Lord hold us by the hand.”* Good advice for any time.



*Gayle Taylor has been a member of St. Francis for forty years. She enjoys serving as Outreach Minister and being a member of St. Teresa’s Guild. With her friend, Joe Young, she has traveled to several exotic parts of the planet, most recently the Amazon rain forest.*

# Friday, February 24

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Deuteronomy 7:12-16, Psalm 31, Titus 2:1-15, John 1:35-42

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*“Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, “What do you seek?” They said to Him “Rabbi” (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), “where are You staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where He was staying and remained with Him that day (now it was at the tenth hour).” John 1:38-3*

When Andrew and John encounter Jesus, they ask a very literal question, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” Just as these two disciples wanted to know where Jesus resided, I have the same curiosity about where Jesus currently resides. Is He in Heaven, in the hearts of believers, everywhere, or all of the above? But, returning my thoughts to Andrew and John, Jesus answers their question by bringing them home with him. It is not hard to imagine them seeing a residence humble in nature; just a simple shelter. But, the **abide** part of the story is much more important than the *reside* is. And, in abiding with Jesus, they had much deeper questions answered. Before being asked where He was staying, Jesus asked Andrew and John, “What do you seek?” Was Jesus disappointed that they simply wanted to know where he was staying? Did they not recognize that He was posing a more deeply probing question about what they might truly be seeking? Did He anticipate that time, teaching, and patience would help them to comprehend the depth and breadth of the answers He had to offer? What do I seek from Jesus?

Once at Jesus’ dwelling place, the two remained with Him for the rest of the day, (“now it was about the tenth hour”). And in spending that time with Jesus, they came to recognize Him as the Messiah, the Christ. Then, they spread the good news.

Please, Jesus, help me to abide with you. May I put aside times to rest where you dwell. Take me out of my busy daily life so that I might focus on the eternal rather than the temporal. Let me hear and understand Your words. Let me always seek You and hope for deeper understanding. May I see where you reside in nature, in myself, in others. May I always be grateful for your saving grace no matter what my circumstances are.



*Sharon Craig-Insalata is a wife, mother, grandmother, and retired educator. She began attending St. Francis last year. Sharon loves being a greeter in Sunday School. Her hobbies include reading, hiking, and playing Pickleball (badly).*

# Saturday, February 25

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Deuteronomy 7:17-26, Psalm 30, Titus 3:1-15, John 1:43-51

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My intention in writing this devotional piece is to write something graceful, something that will resonate with others. I know that in order to resonate with others, the message must be authentic, and spark a feeling. Upon reading Psalm 30, I was inspired by the realness of the rhythm of the Psalm.

Psalm 30 begins with David extolling the Lord for lifting him up, or in my own words, rejoicing in Him for bringing through a hard time. David expressed that he wouldn't have been able to make it through without the hand of God. David talks about how he cried out to God and He was there, never leaving him along the way. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." This line reminds us to find light in the darkness. With every struggle there comes a lesson to be learned, with every hardship something good comes along. We are reminded that while the moment is fleeting, God is constant. While we may be upset or feel tested by life's circumstances, we can allow ourselves to feel those emotions, but return back to God for guidance and nurturing of our souls. We can be sure that after night comes morning, just as sure as we can be that God will never let us walk alone. He is always walking with us. While the journey may be hard at times, we know that He has a plan for us that is better than any plan we might have for ourselves. His plan is for good.

We learn that David, too, wrestled with these feelings ... feelings of frustration, sadness, feeling like God had forgotten about him because the path ahead seemed so bleak. David cried, he begged for help from God, and through his communication, "*Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing.*"

Let this Psalm remind us that our relationship with God is interactive, not passive. If you are feeling forgotten, lonely, anxious, troubled ... know that God is a simple prayer away. Talk to God and He listens. Our relationship with God is personal. It is our duty as Christians to keep our faith, having the deep knowing in the midst of the storm that God will bring us through, and we will be transformed as a result; that we may be elevated through our struggles to places higher and better than we could have imagined. We will look back and thank God for being so constant in our lives and never leaving us. David ends the Psalm as he began, filled with joy and gratitude.

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# Saturday, February 25

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Deuteronomy 7:17-26, Psalm 30, Titus 3:1-15, John 1:43-51

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Oh, the rollercoaster of life! May we accept our mountains and valleys and be in peace with them as God is walking our paths with us. Find peace in the mundane. Find comfort in knowing God will always make sure you come out on top. Find patience in the path. Just as ocean waters ebb and flow, so do we grow in the seasons of change.

Growing and evolving is not always sunshine and flowers; we learn through what we go through, knowing God is walking with us. We find ourselves at the top of the mountain (similar to when I recently graduated college), but the view only lasts so long before you have to go back home to hike another trail (similar to my now applying for grad school). Each chapter of our life is so beautiful if we learn to appreciate these cycles and do so knowing that by the grace of God, we do not hike alone.



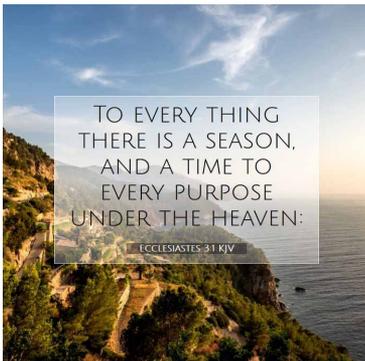
*Brittany Montiel is currently applying for law school after graduating Summa Cum Laude from Arizona State University in December 2022. She is working full time at a law firm in Los Angeles. Outside of work and education, Brittany loves to spend time with and cook for her parents, brother and cousins. She grew up going to St. Francis every Sunday and enjoys getting involved in the parish whenever possible. She is grateful for the prayers and support she has received from a number of parishioners since she began her adulting adventure.*

# Sunday, FEBRUARY 26

**F**or everything there is a season,  
and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8



# Monday, February 27

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Deuteronomy 8:11-20, Psalm 41, Hebrews 2:11-18, John 2:1-12

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*“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.”* Deuteronomy 8:17-18

When I saw the list of scriptures for this day I just knew I’d select something from the New Testament. After all, I usually find that more accessible. On first reading, however, those were not the passages which spoke to me; similarly on second and third. So, rather than the miracle of turning water into wine for example, I’ve been drawn to a passage that calls us to remember to keep God’s commands; to remember where our blessings come from.

Memory is so powerful, so valuable. I work in a history department at a university, though I am not an historian. Learning (remembering) the past can help us understand what has shaped the world as it is and the world as it can be. In recent years I’ve watched my mother-in-law live with rapidly diminishing memory but with enough intact to understand that she is not as she once was. I know that my own memory is less sharp than it once was and that’s sometimes frightening and often frustrating.

So, just a few thoughts the power of remembering. Remembering that we are loved can see us through times of loneliness. Remembering loss can be an impetus for valuing the present. Remembering mistakes can guide us away from making those same errors again. Remembering successes can remind us that we are capable of achievement. Remembering what has worked in battling the pandemic may help us stay healthy moving forward. Remembering to obey God is our call. Remembering that God, who is greater than our deepest imagination, is here with us and for us is profoundly powerful. Remembering to pray keeps us connected to God. Remembering to thank God is right and it feels good.

What will you remember today?



*Susan Tsuji is a mother, a wife, a worker, a reader, a jigsaw and crossword puzzle solver, a walker, a photographer, a traveler, and throughout all those things and here at St. Francis, a singer.*

# Tuesday, February 28

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Deuteronomy 9:4-12, Psalm 45, Hebrews 3:1-11, John 2:13-22

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*“Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.” Hebrews 3: 5-6*

Oftentimes, when we think of “God’s house”, St. Francis, we think of our beautiful grounds, which are maintained so carefully throughout the year. Or we think of our beautiful chapel and the main church, where we worship, pray and sing. However, in fact, the parishioners and staff are the actual Church because they enable it to function. Without them, the buildings and grounds of our Church would be unused, vacant and silent. As the verse above states, “We are His house.”

The words “Time, Talent and Treasure” often express the ways in which we parishioners contribute to St. Francis. I am pleased to report that pledge amounts of individual and family parishioners for year 2023 exceed such amounts to St. Francis for year 2022. This is a clear indication of financial support for the Church as our new Rector starts his ministry. At the same time, I am continuously amazed at the tremendous volunteer effort of our parishioners in all aspects of the Church’s life – from worship and the Church school to outreach and fellowship. Thank you all so much!

We do all of this because we believe in our Lord Jesus Christ – in what he said, taught and did – and because we believe in His Resurrection and in life-everlasting. As the above verse states, “*We hold firm the confidence and pride that belong to hope.*” Moreover, we do our best to live in the way Jesus Christ wishes us to live; we do not just believe, but we also enact our faith.



*Richard Briggs has been a member of St. Francis Church for almost forty years. He currently serves as Junior Warden.*

# Wednesday, March 1

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Deuteronomy 9:13-21, Psalm 119:49-72, Hebrews 3:12-19, John 2:23-3:15

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*“What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit... The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”* John 3:6, 8

The piece that most spoke to me from today’s readings was this excerpt from John 3. The other readings delve into the rebellious human nature and how that was the downfall of many. There’s a theme of listening (or not listening) to the Word of God. In this chapter of John, Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom of God without being “born of water and Spirit.” Nicodemus is confused, because he does not understand how a person can be born from the womb again once grown. This is where Jesus differentiates between being born of the flesh and being born of the Spirit. Being born of the Spirit does not mean a physical re-birth, it means a process of being taken up by the Spirit and letting the machinations of our physical existence fall away like background noise so that we can tune in to the Word of God.

The Hebrew word for Spirit is ruach, which means “wind” and it also means “breath.” So in this passage, I find a possible path we can follow to quiet the mind and get into a state of deep listening. It’s meditating with the intention of listening for God’s voice. Even the psalms have the rhythm of breath – each pair of lines is like an inhale followed by an exhale. I wonder if they were created with that meditative quality in mind.

It is impossible to \*listen\* for the presence of God with all the chatterings going on in our human flesh-based, survival-oriented mind. If we use the wind analogy provided by Jesus, you can sit and tune in to the sound of your breath, without worrying about where it’s coming from or where it is going. As you do, also let thoughts pass without concern for where they came from or where they are going. In doing this, you can find a quiet space within where the usual scripts/worries/distractions just fall away. Set aside concerns of the flesh for a moment and focus on the spirit-breath...listen for the Spirit.

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# Wednesday, March 1

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Deuteronomy 9:13-21, Psalm 119:49-72, Hebrews 3:12-19, John 2:23-3:15

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You may receive a clear message in this quiet space, and you may not. It is the act of \*listening\* — the practice of turning our attention away from the physical world and aligning our mind with Spirit — that is important. A simple but powerful and loving way to reconnect to your devotion to God.



*Jill Lynch has been a member of St. Francis for 20 years and a member of the Choir for almost that entire time. Jill teaches yoga part-time. She and her partner Kelly are the proud parents of three children - Shannon (20), Reese (16), and Jordan (11).*

# Thursday, March 2

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Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5, Psalm 50, Hebrews 4:1-10, John 3:16-21

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*”But you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. You did not trust him or obey him. You have been rebellious against the LORD ...”* Deuteronomy 9:23b-24

What resonated for me from the passage of Deuteronomy was the phrase *“You have been rebellious against the LORD”*; from Psalm 50, it was the phrase *“Offer unto God thanksgiving”*; from Hebrews it was *“who have believed do enter that rest”*, and from John 3:16-21, it was the phrase *“condemned already”*.

When I suffer, I ask, “Why me, God”? It is not my fault because You, God, put me here. I had nothing to do with it. I did not ask for it. This Lenten season, I want to change my conversation to say that it is still not my fault, and I accept lovingly that it is Your fault, God. Because if I truly believe it is Your fault, then I can only believe that I must accept it. I want to practice my acceptance during this Lenten season and beyond by lovingly accepting that it is Your fault, and that I need to stop trying to control Your outcome and try more to be the outcome that You, God, have shown that I can be, by the dying of Your only Son on the cross. I am coming to realize that I am causing my suffering by fighting Your way of things. I want to rebel less to Your way, so I might experience that peace beyond understanding here, and enter Your rest.

I want very much to enter Your rest, God. If I believe that I am condemned already, then I must be forgiven already. I must train myself this Lenten season to believe that I am forgiven already, so I have to stop playing the victim card, poor me. If I truly believe it is Your fault, then only You can make it right and I can only make a path for Your righteousness by accepting Your will and way. I hope to experience at the end of this Lenten season Your blessings that You are pleased with me for surrendering my burdens of fears to You.



*Darryl Tillman is a vestry member and has been with St. Francis for over 27 years. Thanks to Jay, John, and Liz/Mary Bacon, Darryl found a loving and accepting church that has continued to allow him to live his best life.*

# Friday, March 3

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Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Psalm 40, Hebrews 4:11-16, John 3:22-36

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*“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.”* Deuteronomy 10:12-15

My faith journey has led me to come to the Bible with a mental posture of a beggar, with figurative upturned hands stretched out in front of me. As such, I am drawn to passages with explicit promises of God’s grace, goodness, and mercy. I’ve learned where these lie in the open—especially in the New Testament.

But Deuteronomy? This book has never been front-of-mind for me. I’ve rarely tarried here in the four decades since my conversion. I’m happy to report that reflecting on this passage from chapter ten has been an extraordinary blessing and encouragement to me—such a delightful surprise.

No other book in the Old Testament was more prominent to Jesus than Deuteronomy. He quotes from this book more than any other book. It’s the last of the five books of Moses, who—before Jesus—was the mediator between God and his people. He carried God’s Ten Commandments down the mountain to Israel on two stone tablets.

Our passage starts with Moses’ charging Israel to *“walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord.”* (10:12-13) But Moses reminds Israel of God’s faithfulness as the motivation for obedience: *“the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers, and chose... you above all peoples.”* (10:15) Even before Moses reiterates the commandments, he quotes what God said to Israel about why they should obey them: *“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of... the land of slavery” into the land of blessing and promise.* (5:6)

So I find great encouragement in a most vital theme in the Bible, even here in Deuteronomy. Obedience to God’s laws is a proper response to His love, not a means of earning it. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be grace. In the previous chapter, Moses notes that despite Israel’s unfaithfulness, the Lord was faithful *“by [his] great power and [saved them by his] outstretched arm.”* (9:29) Thank the Lord it is so! Amen.

*Dale Westerveldt is a husband and father, a seminary graduate, and a former vestry member at St. Francis. He is also a lover of the St. Francis community and the liturgical tradition of the Episcopal church.*

# Saturday, March 4

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Deuteronomy 11:18-28, Psalm 55, Hebrews 5:1-10, John 4:1-26

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*“But no one who drinks this water that I give will get thirsty again. The water I give is like a flowing fountain that gives eternal life.” The woman replied, ‘Sir please give me a drink of that water! Then I won’t get thirsty and have to come to this well again.’” John 4:14-15*

I found this reading from John to be quite remarkable. First of all, Jesus is talking to a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. Ordinarily a Jew would not be speaking with a Samaritan, plus, she is a woman. Jesus asks the woman for a drink of water. She is skeptical as he doesn’t even have a bucket. Jesus continues in conversation and leads the woman to a point where she now believes he can give her eternal life. To me this was extraordinary — what a blessed encounter! Jesus took the time to have a life-changing conversation with this fortunate woman, who believed he could be the Messiah and after a random encounter took a leap of faith.

Have you ever taken a “Leap of Faith”? A leap of faith could relate to the physical world, like Nike’s tagline, “Just Do It”, the mental, “I think I can ace this test, even though I haven’t studied” or the spiritual, facing a dire situation a person tells themselves, “God will provide”. I know for myself, I’ve experienced a leap of faith in all these areas in my life. In focusing on the spiritual, what specifically requires **you** to take a leap of faith in order to believe that Christ is our Redeemer? Do you ever insert yourself into passages from the Bible and try to imagine yourself there?

One Christmas I had a profound experience when traveling to the Holy Land. I was present for the Christmas Eve service in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. After the service, one has the opportunity to proceed to a grotto to a spot that is marked with a gold star. It’s purported to be the exact spot where Christ was born. It was very moving to be in such a holy place. Also, being in the Shepherds’ Field seeing the sky and thinking about how the Wise Men saw the star that led them to the Christ Child. I also visited Abraham’s well in Beersheba and pondered all that may have used that well and their experiences. I found that physically being in these places that I had already read about was profound.

What situations in your life have caused you to take a leap of faith spiritually?

*Cheryl Gutierrez has been a member of St. Francis for 29 years. She and her husband, Hector, have one daughter, Sabrina, and are blessed with a 2-year-old granddaughter, Isolde. Cheryl has enjoyed being one of the original members of St. Teresa’s Guild. Volunteering her time with the St. Francis Outreach Scholarship Fund is a special love.*

Sunday, March 5

a time to be born,  
and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to  
pluck up what is planted;



# Monday, March 6

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Jeremiah 1:11-19, Psalm 56 or 57, Romans 1:1-15, John 4:27-42

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In John's Gospel, a weary woman pauses. Sacred words pour from her lips after a deep breath as she exhales her prayer: *Be gracious to me, God...My adversaries trample me all day, for many arrogantly fight against me. (Ps. 56:1-2)* Trying to avoid people, she approaches her ancestors' well mid-day. Her heart sinks. There's a man lingering, and no one else is around. *When I am afraid, I will trust in you...I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? (Ps. 56:3-4)*

The woman avoiding the man's gaze can tell he is watching. He opens his mouth and asks for a drink. She prays before responding. *They twist my words all day long; all their thoughts against me are evil. They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps while they wait to take my life...(Ps. 56:5-7)* Guarded, she chooses her words, "Jews do not associate with Samaritans." She can see through the corner of her eye that his face is soft and curious. Lingering words are captured with inhaled breath. She is seen. He tells her of moments in time that only she knows in full. *Who is this man?* She speaks, "I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." The man responds, "I, the one speaking to you, am he." (*Excerpts from John 4:9-26*) Her mind finds only the words hidden in her heart, *You, yourself have recorded my wanderings. Put my tears in your bottle...my enemies will retreat on the day when I call. This I know: God is for me. (Ps. 56:8-9)*

A group of men are walking toward the well. She doesn't wait to hear their words. Somehow, whatever posture they may carry doesn't matter. Leaving her belongings, she speaks first, "Could this be the Messiah? He told me everything I ever did!" (John 4:29) She had to share this Living Water, *In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mere humans do to me? (Ps 56:10-11)* She is without thirst for the first time.

The importance of the moment is lost on the group. Instead, they urge the man to eat. He responds, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." (John 4:32) "The disciples said to one another, 'Could someone have brought him something to eat?'" (John 4:33) "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." The man was satisfied from a

*Contd. on next page...*

# Monday, March 6

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Jeremiah 1:11-19, Psalm 56 or 57, Romans 1:1-15, John 4:27-42

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*Contd. from previous page...*

meal with the woman who accepted his invitation to partake. “Don’t you say, ‘There are still four more months and then comes the harvest?’ Listen to what I’m telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest.” (John 4:34-35)

Perhaps this is when Jesus brought their attention toward the woman now returning with her village. As she came beckoning the crowd to follow her to the man who not only told her everything she had ever done, he also allowed her to live giving her Living Water and the feast of truly knowing him.

Jesus would once again declare thirst after a weary journey. This time he wouldn’t ask for water; he knew their offering would never satisfy. His lips received their sour wine. The lips that declared knowledge of everything that had been done were now satiated from doing the work he was sent to do. Then he said, “It is finished.” With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30) Perhaps sitting at his feet was the one who first met Jesus at the well. As she raises her eyes toward Jesus she prays, ...*I will make my thank offerings to you. For you rescued me from death...to walk before God in the light of life. (Ps. 56:12-13)*

Amen.



*Angie Witt: Beloved by God and one who identifies with the woman who met Jesus at the well – desperate to not thirst and weary. May we meet Jesus*

# Tuesday, March 7

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Jeremiah 2:1-13, Psalm 61, Romans 1:16-25, John 4:43-54

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This reflection focuses on the passage from Paul's epistle to the Romans.

Paul begins his letter by commending the followers because their faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. Paul boldly says that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. And he makes it clear that this includes the Jew, the Greek, and the barbarian. The key is that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith: The just shall live by faith.

But what about those who profess to know God but instead worship His creatures? They have become vain in their imagination. Verse 22 is explicit: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Paul enumerates a lengthy list of such vanities, including changing the truth of God into a lie. We are quite adept at creating our own gods.

What does this mean today? Paul asks how do we embody a life where the power of the resurrection of the risen Jesus, and our day to day conduct, define who we are and how we live? The standard is a high bar. This is not easy. Nobody, including Jesus, ever said it would be.

Perhaps the best we can do is to concentrate on being just. And keep in mind: "The righteous man shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17b).



*Joe Young has been active in the outreach programs of St. Francis for several years, which have been coordinated by his friend Gayle Taylor. Joe and Gayle have traveled to many disparate places on this planet, including the Amazon rain forest, Andorra, Uganda, Scotland, and Israel.*

# Wednesday, March 8

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Jeremiah 3:6-18, Psalm 72, Rom 1:28-2:11, John 5:1-18

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*“Wait for the Lord. Be strong and let your heart take courage. Wait for the lord!”* Psalm 27:14

Psalm 27 spoke to me of the fear I felt during the beginning of the recent Pandemic and all the losses I experienced: no gathering with family or friends, no exercise classes, items missing from shelves, no church. The hardest thing for me was that we could not share singing. I was devastated, what would we do?

So, I took a chance: I learned to sing in a closed room with only me, myself and I. I thought I sounded terrible! I was used to singing harmonies with a large group, a choir. It was so hard to sing by myself where I had to imagine those harmonies.

What I did not realize was to keep singing this way for over 2½ years would change my outlook and ease my fear. I had the courage to try something I had never done. How thrilling it was to sing with music groups who also missed singing as much as I did. The best part was they wanted me to sing with them!

I was given hope, I was not alone. Who knew I would meet so many new people to sing with? Such wonderful newly composed music, and old favorites from composers I knew respected, and loved?

I met musicians from all over the world. No one said I sounded terrible. I began to trust in the Lord, to wait for the Lord to show me that we could make it through this pandemic.

The best thing was I became more comfortable singing on my own, by myself. I did lose people I loved because of the Pandemic. But I could sing with others to say goodbye. It was not the singing with people I stood beside, it was singing in a new way. I was blessed to meet all those singers from all over the world. Singing is prayer, and I was glad to keep on praying.



*Susie Zimmerman is a 25-year member of St. Francis. She is learning another new skill: how to be part of the Altar Guild. She is always looking for new ways to serve our military from home, as these troops keep us safe all over the world.*

# Thursday, March 9

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Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28, Psalm 71, Romans 2:12-24, John 5:19-29

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*“Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress... Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent... O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! ...*

*But I will hope continually, and will praise you yet more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all day long... I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to you; my soul also which you have rescued” Psalm 71: 3, 9, 14-15, 22-23.*

When I entered my 6th decade, it became clear that I had inherited the arthritis gene that afflicted so many of my relatives in previous generations. Within 12 years I needed joint replacements and spine surgeries to repair damage from that disease. I am now looking at more joint replacements in the next 6 months to alleviate pain from the same disease.

With this background, Psalm 71 clearly spoke to me. Written by King David in his later years with many enemies both inside and outside his borders and in his family, the psalm asks God for deliverance from his enemies. David reminds us that God is his refuge and fortress, and that he continually has hope and praises God with singing and shouting for joy! While my enemy is a disease and David’s was people, this psalm reminds me that God is my refuge and fortress and will bring me through all difficult times. And the psalm reminds me to praise God every day for his goodness and salvation. Singing praises to God always brings me great joy, and I continue to sing God’s praises while I am on hiatus from attending church and singing in the choir in person.

David also reminds us of God’s great acts of salvation. The greatest of these occurred many centuries after David’s time when God sent his Son Jesus to us. In the Gospel of John, Jesus states the most important salvation good news of his incarnation: “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and “believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24, NIV). Psalm 71 reminds us to praise God for this promise of salvation and eternal life every day of our lives and to shout praises of God’s great act of salvation that rescues our souls.



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

# Friday, March 10

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Jeremiah 5:1-9, Psalm 69, Romans 2:25-3:18, John 5:30-47

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*“Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble.”* Psalm 69:17

In my childhood church after a baptism the minister would walk back and forth along the church aisle proudly showing the newly baptized baby to the congregation as we sang the blessing,

“The Lord bless you and keep you: the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and be gracious unto you.”

It is one of my favorite memories – the parents’ excitement, the tangible sense of God’s presence, and the love and support of the community for this fragile infant.

What happens though when we cannot feel the warmth of God’s presence? In today’s passage David is “in deep waters,” exhausted, crying out, waiting for God. Everything has gone wrong and God is hidden from him. He is vulnerable and desperate. We’ve all had times of deep distress: sickness, financial worries, stress and attack from those seeking to harm us. And yet God is absent.

It is hard to trust God when everything is falling apart. It is difficult to keep believing when our safety has been stripped from us. Prayer does not magically take our problems away. Instead, it opens us to a deep vulnerability and humility, recentering and refocusing us back to that child-like position of dependence on God. And that can be painful.

In our society there’s a strong cultural belief that we are in control of our destiny. But when tragedy strikes, it is shattering to realize how little control we have. We are like that infant carried by the minister – defenseless, and in need of God’s grace. But we also need our faith community to uphold and support us. We need their help to keep believing when we are weak in faith and floundering.

As God’s people we are His presence in a world when people are desperate for hope, and comfort, when they feel as if God has abandoned them. We are that gathered family assuring people of God’s presence when they are in despair offering real support and being the answer to the prayer, “Save me God.”



*Alison Houghton Kral loves all things espresso related and knows a thing or two about the coffee establishments in the South Bay and beyond. On her days off she likes being in nature reading and sipping cortados. Her children Ethan and Chloe are a constant source of wonder and fun.*

# Saturday, March 11

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Jeremiah 5:20-31, Psalm 75, Rom 3:19-31, John 7:1-13

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*“For ‘no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement ...” Romans 3:20-25*

I find this passage both provides me with direction and gives me comfort – “since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement”.

I expect that the first few verses in this reading relate for most of us - I do try to follow both Civil and God’s Law. I may succeed in following Civil Law, apart from an infrequent parking or traffic violation, but when it comes to following God’s Law, I know I often fall short. For even the simplest of rules, such as “love they neighbor”, I find myself not always being patient and being judgmental of others at times – just one of my many shortfalls. I acknowledge that my actions at times most certainly qualify as sins: For no human will be justified in his sight by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin”.

But thankfully as this passage reminds me, I know that through God’s grace with our faith in Jesus Christ, we have redemption. I don’t consider this grace as a pass for my sinning, but rather for me, it provides comfort that God doesn’t expect us to be perfect. This encourages me to continue to work towards fully abiding by God’s laws to show my appreciation for this gift of grace.

During this Lenten season, I pray that we all find comfort in God’s grace, and that we continue to work on living by God’s Laws, focusing on closing our individual gaps. For me, looking at our banners every Sunday – “Love God”, “Love Others”, “Serve the World” – are simple reminders of where I should focus.



*Robin Pano has been a St. Francis parishioner since the early 90s, originally from Chicago area, with two grown daughters – Kelsey and Taylor. She loves our church and is actively involved in worship, altar guild, outreach and most social events.*

Sunday,  
MARCH 12

a time to kill,  
and a time to heal;

a time to break down,  
and a time to build up;



The poppies of Flanders Fields

# Monday, March 13

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Jeremiah 7:1-15, Psalm 80, Romans 4:1-12, John 7:14-36

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The last line of Psalm 80 spoke to me. *“Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!”* I learned that the meaning of Psalm 80 is a communal lament in which the worshipping community calls upon God to rescue them from trouble.

Let’s think about that for a moment. Over the span of time, all of us, no matter how similar or different our lives are, have had trouble at one time or another. This Psalm speaks about how God is asked to restore the land and the people. This still fits our world today. We are in need to restore our land (Earth), our people (ourselves, family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, etc.), and, dare I say, our faith and hearts. I often look at these readings as a time for reflection, a time to breathe, a time to look for the positive in some corner of life. In this Psalm, it calls for God’s right-hand man, the Son of man. It calls for Jesus.

We are lucky to have God and Jesus to share our troubles with when we can’t carry all the weight. My dad used to say, “Let Jesus have it; he can take it.” I have learned that all our troubles may not be resolved or may not be answered as we would like. But with faith and leaning on God and Jesus, the path through troubles in our lives can be a bit more peaceful.

During this time of Lent, let us think of times God and Jesus have restored us by shining their faces on us. Let us think about troubles we have come through or helped others through. Amen.



*Alyce, Michael (husband), and Ryan Metzroth (son) have been a part of St. Francis Church since July 2016. Alyce recently wrapped up her time on the Vestry and helps with the St. Luke’s Food for the Homeless. She and the family finally went on vacation to London in March 2022. She still plans to travel to Spain someday in the future.*

# Tuesday, March 14

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

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*“Obey my voice, and I will be your God and you shall be my people.”*

Jeremiah 7:23

Is it right to bargain or challenge God’s laws? Or maybe be clever and use the “grey” interpretation to our benefit or to rationalize our actions?

Our readings remind us that true faithfulness (those that believe deeply and obey) find their way to God’s grace. Our actions and thoughts are more important than our words. We should not take the Lord’s kindness for granted, for there are limits to His forgiveness toward those who are disingenuous or do not obey his commandments. We are to seek spiritual nourishment and connection through our faith and inner listening. By embracing His message, we can find the everlasting “Living Water” and deepen our relationship with the Lord as one of His people.

As I reflect on these readings, it reminds me of the mercy that parents show children. As a parent I set boundaries and had hard rules. My children would bargain and plead, but for the most part, they followed the rules. But when there were violations, punishment was typically in the form of lost privileges. The God of my understanding is not one that will smite those who do not obey but, is a parent who patiently and lovingly provides lessons in our life’s journeys.



*Val Valiquette has been a member of St. Francis since 2018. Holly and Val were married in April 2022 and now have 3 wonderful adult children: Connor (25), Michael (31) and Elise (33). Val has 36 years of experience in Global Supply Chain Management as an executive in the Aerospace and Defense Industry. He enjoys traveling, watching sports, golfing and volunteering as an usher and working the sound system for St. Francis.*

# Wednesday, March 15

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Jeremiah 8:18-9:6, Psalm 119:97-120, Romans 5:1-11, John 8:12-20

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*“Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through which we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; ...and not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us...”* Romans 5:1-4

A year or two ago, when I entered my seventh decade, I realized, wow, it really is about the much maligned and cliched “journey”, and I’m going to take advantage of this realization. So, as I am on the first page or two of the next chapter of “My Journey - My Life”, I’m appreciatively tackling Romans 5:1-11 with as much enthusiasm as I can muster; oh, the irony! It is a challenge! Such a challenge. And yet, I know, deep within, I am meant to reflect on and write about this, all from the perspective of a 61-year-old woman whose 23-year-old son now lives and works in Tokyo; a woman who has been a real estate agent for 30 years, who loves to cook and entertain, especially when her fellow St. Francis parishioners are involved.

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live,” Joan Didion once wrote, and so I find Romans 5:1-11 as a powerful canon of human experience; challenges and suffering, of endurance and hope, and of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. In this passage, we are reminded that suffering is not a curse or a punishment, but a necessary part of the journey of life. It is through our hardships and difficulties that we grow and mature, developing the qualities of perseverance, character, and hope that are so essential for a fulfilling life. Our experiences of suffering may come and go, but through it all, we are called to trust in the promise of ultimate victory through Christ, a promise of a life lived with purpose, meaning, and hope.

We are called to embrace our challenges, not as obstacles, but as opportunities for growth and transformation. In the face of adversity, we can rise above it and find within ourselves a wellspring of inner strength and resilience. So let us not be afraid of suffering and challenges, but rather let us see them as the shaping forces of our lives, the catalysts for growth and change, and the building blocks of a more brilliant tomorrow. For it is through these experiences that we truly come to understand the meaning and purpose of our existence.



*Terri Tsuchida has been a parishioner for over ten years. She happily assists the Altar Guild, helps with the venerable Antique Show and its Gazebo, the Rummage Sale, and Designs for Dining, and enjoys St T’s and St Anne’s Guilds. Just don’t ask her to do a spreadsheet!*

# Thursday, March 16

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Jeremiah 10:11-24, Psalm 42, Romans 5:12-21, John 8:21-32

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*“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night while people say to me continually, where is your God?”* Psalm 42:1-3

So often when we are in the midst of something painful, illness, the death of a loved one, or concern for our friends or family, we turn to God and ask him to take the pain away. There are times when the hurt is eliminated and our loved one heals, or a new opportunity presents itself as the light at the end of the tunnel, and we thank God for helping us and allowing us to move forward with renewed hope. But there are times when the pain is not diminished, and we continue to suffer through continued grief, illness or concern. Where is God then?

This Psalm is filled with ornate phrases of the longing and desperation of someone asking for God’s help but not finding a resolution. In some ways it seems that God is not listening, and outsiders question the faith of the writer. But we then read about hope. “Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.” (Psalm 42:5): “By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.” (Psalm 42:8). God is always with us through the difficult times; He never leaves us, He walks with us. While it is not easy to always trust in this message when things are not resolved the way I think they should be, I am trying to incorporate a reminder of God’s constant love into my Lenten meditation.

The season of Lent is a hopeful time! It is a time for us to reflect on how Jesus suffered and sacrificed for our sins and failures so that we may always have the future hope of who we can be with God’s grace. May we all feel hopeful this Lenten season as we seek a deeper and closer relationship with God.



*Mary Deley and her family have been members of St. Francis for over 20 years. Along with her husband Tony, and their children, Adelaide, Clara and Will, she has loved being a part of this very special community! Mary currently serves on the vestry and enjoys helping with fellowship events.*

# Friday, March 17

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Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-20, Psalm 88, Romans 6:1-11, John 8:33-47

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*“Obey my voice.’ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded hem to do, but they did not.”*  
Jeremiah 11:7- 8

*“They answered him ‘We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’”*  
John 8:33

Israel and Judah broke their covenant with God, so Jeremiah was sent to proclaim God’s command, “Obey my voice.” With the Holy Spirit’s guidance, Jesus teaches me obey God. Jesus frees me by saving me and teaching to be the authentic human Jesus sees within me. With this freedom I am able to risk living fully in all experiences, being fully present and accepting toward others.

Because of fear, I have the choice to hide what is on my heart for fear of being judged, rejected or embarrassed. I have the choice to keep any negative thoughts, positive thoughts and discussions to myself. I could make someone angry because I may say or bring up a discussion they do not want to hear. I may be tempted to keep a compliment silent for fear it will be misunderstood. Jesus breaks me free from fears for if I “Let go, Let God”, I will be able to risk opening my heart to new opportunities.

I will accept God’s voice that sends me to do work that I am called to do. If I feel that I need to say something, I will discern what needs to be said, and let the Spirit guide. I will speak not to change a person’s mind, but because I care. I will risk mistakes, rejection, sorrow, joy and acceptance. This Lenten season, I will risk being a surprise to others by accepting, forgiving, asking for forgiveness, finding a way to be freer to share who I am, and sharing my heart.

I will be free in the love of Jesus and will invite others to join me. I, with God’s help, will “obey God’s voice” living fully in the journey God has planned for me. I will obey God’s will for me, even with hesitation. I will take risks, and love God, myself and others by serving the Lord.

*“Sing like no one is listening, love like you never been hurt, dance like no one is watching and live like it is heaven on earth.” (Mark Twain)*

*Reverend Celeste Stump is a deacon at St. Francis, chaplain at The Canterbury, mother, grandmother, and friend. She is inspired by the grace and love of each person she meets and is changed by their presence in her life. “I am blessed and thankful to be part of this wonderful community of St. Francis and The Canterbury.”*

# Saturday, March 18

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Jeremiah 13:1-11, Psalm 87, Romans 6:12-23, John 8:47-59

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*Psalm 87 means never lose site/sight*

A song singing to me

A poem

“Joy of living“

Tyre mentioned again in the Bible

in my beloved Lebanon, which is cited 75 times in the Bible

How could I not embrace these words?

This song was written for musicians, sons of Kora, in Solomon’s temple though I would choreograph a dance of joy to it, circling around its columns. Solomon built these columns from the Cedars of Lebanon, as many church builders did.

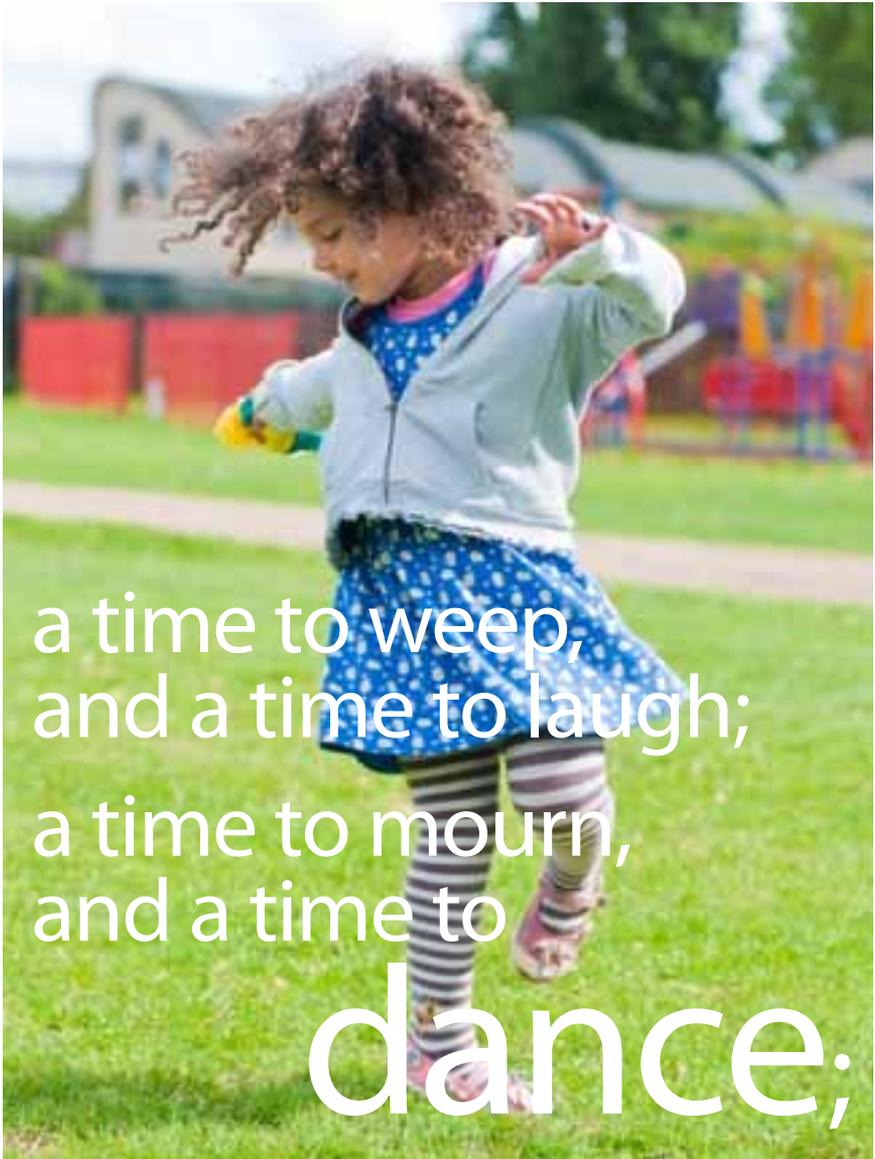
When I first traveled with Dick to ski down the mountains of the majestic Cedars, I felt their power and pride, their covering and hovering. Sadly, the Civil War in Lebanon decades ago, destroyed many, but growth in peace are spreading branches there now. How we all grow in peaceful times...

Mention of people arriving to the holy city from Tyre conjured memories of my devoted parents, a few of my Lebanese cousins and I visiting there. It is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world! The song tells us that people also came from other countries near Israel to the site of Jerusalem. What a beautiful, bonding sight to think of people from all over the world visiting one site, the “church”. If only this were true today! People from everywhere with a common goal and desire to seek out one destination to be with God. As I reflect on the Jerusalem I enjoyed in 1965, I picture the edifices which represented the three monotheistic religions. I toured each one realizing how wonderful that a city could be split among Christians, Jews and Muslims. Two Jerusalems are mentioned in this song, one tangible site on earth and one spiritual sight with God.

My final reflections are to never lose sight of a Jerusalem of heaven, feeling joy among those I love and know, celebrating with God and with all his people in his church! My final commitment in Lent and always must be to serve and please God. I must never lose sight that in living and dying, I wish my final journey to be Jerusalem...

*Elizabeth Cantine is a retired English, history and dance educator. She currently teaches, choreographs and performs dance with her senior adult students and young adults with special needs. She is the author of Graceful Gratitude and Brush of Giftedness. Her third book Misty Meets Palet at Segerstrom will be in print in February.*

Sunday,  
MARCH 19



a time to weep,  
and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn,  
and a time to  
dance;

# Monday March 20

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Jeremiah 16:10-21, Psalm 89:1-18, Romans 7:1-12, John 6:1-15

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*“Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.” Psalm 89:15*

I do understand and share this feeling from Psalm 89. I feel a lot of gratitude in his light while walking or running on the Esplanade in Redondo Beach. There is a simplicity and peace that comes with just walking or running to clear your head and listening to the great blessings of nature that He has provided us, especially in Southern California. I feel such a warm feeling of peace as I walk or run in the natural environment. I really enjoy the peaceful sounds of the ocean or the quiet serenity of nature. I find this to be the best medicine for stress or relief from the often-insurmountable pressures of life.

Whenever I think life is dealing me too much to handle or I need to get some relief, I visit the Esplanade. This is where I believe in the symbolism of “the light of Thy countenance” and the feeling of being truly blessed with the simple things. I admit, I had to look up countenance (LOL)! It is the expression appearing on the face of the Lord as He looks upon His people. As I get older, I can appreciate this more. Different people see different things when they think of God or Christ, but I can see Him saying as He looks down on us, “Look at all these treasures, isn’t this the coolest of creations?”

Another great example of “knowing the joyful sound” is whenever I golf. There is a natural sound that I find extremely gratifying when golfing, that of nature and His creatures going about their normal day. I appreciate the smell of freshly mowed grass, sounds of birds chirping, squirrels “squirreling”, trees whistling from the wind, or crickets/locusts making their familiar sounds. It is those peaceful sights, sounds and smells I focus on when the game inevitably gets interrupted by someone yelling “FORE!”



*Mike, Ryan, and Alyce Metzroth have been part of St. Francis Church since July 2016. Mike is a proud Navy Veteran and enjoys the outdoors. Ryan is 13 years old and in the 7th grade at Ridgecrest Middle School. Alyce is serving on the Vestry. All of the Metzroth family participate in the St. Luke’s Food for the Homeless, including making sandwiches for the food drives, and helping pack boxes for the Camp Pendleton outreach.*

# Tuesday, March 21

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Jeremiah 17:19-27, Psalm 97 or 99, Romans 7:13-25, John 6:16-27

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*“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”* Romans 7:21

Paradox is part of modern life. From time to time we find ourselves in situations we don't understand or relationships that aren't going the way we want them to go. We knew we deserved the promotion at work but we didn't get it; the stock market pick that looked like a sure thing is now a loss that eats a hole in our pocket and our self-esteem. The most difficult paradox to face, however, may be the one that stares at us when we look in the mirror: ourselves. Why is it so hard to live the way we want to live, to love our friends and families unconditionally, to leave the world in a better place?

Paul, writing in Romans, knew a lot about paradox. After all, he had been an orthodox Jew until an encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus turned him into a missionary proclaiming the Christian message across the Mediterranean. But Paul didn't dismiss his internal struggles; instead, he turned to Christ when he felt himself tempted to take the seemingly easier path of giving into his nature, or, perhaps in more modern terminology, letting his “ego” ride over his authentic self.

*Paul writes, “Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law, but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin... Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ.”*

This was written over 2000 years ago, but it sounds pretty modern to me. It is perhaps easier to let despair, hopelessness, and anger take over our lives and push aside the hope and peace that Jesus offers. And from time to time we may forget our covenants and give into what Paul calls “the law of sin.” But the really wonderful paradox is that Christ is still there, still in front of us, and still inviting us into an abundant life. Thanks be to God.



*Gayle Taylor has been a member of St. Francis for forty years. She enjoys serving as Outreach Minister and being a member of St. Teresa’s Guild. With her friend, Joe Young, she has traveled to several exotic parts of the planet, most recently the Amazon rain forest.*

# Wednesday, March 22

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Jeremiah 18:1-11, Psalm 101 or 109, Romans 8:1-11, John 6:27-40

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*“Jesus said to them I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” John 6:35*

This verse is one that speaks to me loud and clear, because of my faith, and the trust I have our Lord.

When I was 13, as I was baptized in the ocean at Torrance Beach and said the words, “I accept Jesus as my Savior”, I felt a sense of both excitement and calm. I felt this again when I was confirmed by Bishop Diane into the Episcopal Church; I could barely sit or stand still as she confirmed me. I had these same feelings once more when I finished EfM, Education for Ministry.

My faith is what gets me through each and every day. My brother told me that I was the only person he knew that could rub 2 nickels together and make ends meet. I told him it is my faith that gets me through both the tough times and good times.

As I went through the process of adopting my daughter Rebecca my faith was really tested. Many said I was doing the wrong thing in adopting her. There were almost 5 years of testing my faith to the limit. I prayed all the time to make sure that I was doing the right thing. Now, to look at the lovely young woman that Rebecca has grown into, I know that God had His hand in this. I thank God each and every day for blessing me with such a special daughter and I always give the glory to God.



*Shelly Crilly Benner has been at St Francis 8 years and loves her St. Francis family. She is on Altar Guild and also does memorial and weddings. She has also been on various committees to help with fundraising, and is a graduate of EfM.*

# Thursday, March 23

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Jeremiah 22:13-23, Psalm 69, Romans 8:12-27, John 6:41-51

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“*Stop grumbling ...*” John 6:43

I dislike being late. And it was with this thought that I left my home for church this morning, leaving a bit later than I'd hoped, but knowing I'd still make it on time if I hit all the traffic lights just right and didn't get stuck behind a slow vehicle on Calle Mayor.

I waved to a man and his young son who were walking their dog as I neared my parked car. Just as I was about to get in, the boy turned around and gleefully exclaimed to me “We're walking our dog!” I paused, knowing that I could either wave him off with a cheerful “Enjoy!” and keep my momentum going into my car, or ... I could give the boy my full attention and respond more wholly. I opted for the latter. “I see that! What a great way to start the day! What is your dog's name?” And thus began our conversation. I learned their other dog Moxy had “gone to heaven”; I shared that our dog Munchkin had gone to heaven several years ago, too, and we concluded there was a good chance the two of them were playing together in heaven.

After our exchange, I got into my car with a lightness of spirit, and I didn't even think about the time. I did not grumble about how I'd now be late for church and instead reflected on the warmth of our interaction. And I was once again reminded that “Church” very much includes what we do outside of our St. Francis Episcopal Church building's walls. I suppose you could say I got to church on time after all!



*Kristina Pelá and her husband Fabrizio raised their children Tavio (23) and Sofia (20) in the St. Francis family and are grateful for the spiritual foundation it provided for them as they left for college.*

# Friday, March 24

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Jeremiah 23:1-8, Psalm 102, Romans 8:28-39, John 6:52-59

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*“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.”*  
John 6:54-56

Each time we take communion, we remember these words.

We live in Jesus and he in us. As the hymn goes: “My flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed, says the Lord”.

The Spirit of God comes down from heaven and dwells in us. All week long we await the “coming” of Christ in Holy Communion.

This Lent we remember our shortcomings. And we eagerly search for the resurrection on Easter.

This is a hard teaching and the congregation struggles with it to understand. They cannot fathom the meaning

Whether standing or kneeling, each Holy Communion is an encounter with God. The Holy Spirit is with us and Jesus himself is present.

The living Christ is near and guides us toward eternal life.

When we take Communion, we say “Amen” which means “I believe”. It is a declaration of our faith. And a dedication to Christ.

Christ’s teaching is not His own, but that of His Father who is in heaven. Each word is from above and is given to Jesus to impart.

Our priests are duty bound to consecrate the bread and wine and present it to the congregation. They are the Vicars of Christ and joyfully offer the elements to everyone.

This Lent, may we pay special attention to Holy Communion. May we delve into the mystery of our faith and embrace it anew. May we seek God and find him in the elements of Holy Communion.



*John Dingee has been a member of the congregation since 2003. He has been absent in recent times due to the Covid pandemic. He has held numerous positions over the years including usher, librarian, reader and vestry member. He gives thanks for his children Hal and Jennifer and his grandchildren Mike, AJ, Erin and Samantha.*

# Saturday, March 25

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Jeremiah 23:9-15, Psalm 107 or 108, Romans 9:1-18, John 6:60-71

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*“It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”* John 6:63

You may be familiar with a song sometimes accompanying Holy Communion entitled, “I Am the Bread of Life.” Its verses are derived from passages in the Gospel of John immediately preceding those in today’s reading. Jesus tells the crowd following Him:

*I am the bread of life, He who comes to me shall not hunger,  
He who believes in me shall not thirst. No one can come to me unless the  
Father draw him...*

*And I will raise him up on the last day.*

*The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world,  
and he who eats of this bread he shall live for ever.*

*And I will raise him up on the last day.*

In today’s passage from John we see what happens next. The disciples grumble and say this teaching is hard to accept—the idea that Jesus is God incarnate and the food he provides offers eternal life. Jesus goes further saying the flesh is useless, it is the spirit that gives life, and that His words are spirit and life. Despite the elaboration, we learn that many disciples turn away. Simon Peter sums up the rationale for those who stay by affirming Jesus does offer “the words of eternal life.”

This emphasis on Jesus’s “words” is critically important in the Gospel of John. Recall this gospel is unique as it introduces Jesus as the Word of God made flesh, full of grace and truth, who has been with God since the beginning of creation. John goes on to describe how it is through Jesus we understand God, recognize God’s authentic nature and intentions, and learn how to experience life as God intends.

John is making a subtle but important distinction. The gospeler does not call upon us to worship Jesus. Rather, John suggests it is through Jesus’s life and “words” we are given a pathway to God and to eternal life. And, according to John, “eternal life” is more than life after death, it is about life that is endless in value and meaning.

Today’s passage from John truly gets to the heart of the expansive nature of his gospel. May the Spirit help us inwardly digest the glory and power of its full meaning.

*Jack Hailwood is a “cradle Episcopalian” who is retired and assists with St. Francis Adult Bible Study.*

# Sunday, March 26

a time to throw away stones,  
and a time to  
gather stones together;

a time to embrace,  
and a time to refrain  
from embracing;



# Monday, March 27

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

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*“How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.”* John 9:10

What a magnificent miracle Jesus performs in today’s Gospel reading, blessing a blind man with the gift of sight! Imagine how it must have felt to be that man, living his entire life being blind, then suddenly being able to see. I wonder what he went on to do with his life.

The question “How then were your eyes opened?” got me thinking about where in my life I might be blind. Where can I ask Jesus to help me see a potential need more clearly?

Sometimes it’s easy to know how we can “successfully” minister to others: fundraisers and outreach efforts at St. Luke’s are fairly obvious. But what about the unplanned areas of our lives, the (perhaps sometimes seemingly insignificant) one-on-one opportunities that enter our personal space each day? Are we as eager to engage in those as we are to sign up for a shift at the Antiques Show? Or do we remain blind to how we can minister to others if it’s not connected to a church-related activity?

Who are we not reaching out to in our blindness?

What if we chose to view people and their circumstances through the lens of the Holy Spirit all the time? God places people before us every day, people who need His love, His comfort, His compassion, His direction. Sometimes we turn a blind eye because we think it’s someone else’s responsibility, or we think it’s none of our business. We might feel ill-equipped to know what to do or say to someone who has suffered a tragic loss, received a grim prognosis or whom we feel we don’t have anything in common with. But God does not expect us to have all the answers. So why don’t we simply ask God to remove our blinders, and then allow ourselves just to be the conduit of His love to others, wherever they are and wherever they may be. By living with our spiritual sights set on God, may our day-to-day eyesight be forever changed.



*Kristina Pelá and Fabrizio have been St. Francis parishioners for more than 20 years. Kristina enjoys serving as Lay Reader, Chalice Bearer, Ministry Council Lead and Shepherd for Pastoral Care. Outside of church, Kristina enjoys tennis, puzzles, and long walks with friends and loved ones.*

# Tuesday, March 28

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Jeremiah 25:8-17, Psalm 120, 121, 122 or 123, Romans 10:1-13, John 9:18-41

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*“I lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”* Psalm 121:1-2

Psalm 121 always reminds me of my first week at West Point during “Plebe Summer,” in 1972. For new cadets (known as “plebes”), those first months adjusting to a new life in the military are very tough. Yet, that summer I learned a comforting message that I hope you too may find useful.

West Point transforms new cadets into soldiers during “Plebe Summer.” The Army separates plebes from anything familiar, while creating as much mental and physical pressure as possible. The Academy shaves their heads on the first day, takes away whatever they brought, then issues them uniforms, toiletries, and every other bit of kit needed. Upperclassmen constantly yell and harass the plebes, while teaching them to march, make beds in the approved method, shine shoes and other skills essential to their totally new life. When not feeling overwhelmed performing unfamiliar tasks, plebes ask themselves, Why am I doing this? Why am I here?

My first, very welcome bit of respite that week, happened on Sunday, after we had marched in formation to a mandatory Chapel service in a large outdoor amphitheater overlooking the Hudson Valley. We had a stunning view of the surrounding hills rising above the river on that beautiful, sunny morning.

The Priest clearly recognized each new cadet’s feelings of intense stress and loneliness and based his sermon on Psalm 121. Pointing to the hills along the river, he noted that in David’s time, watchmen posted on the hills protected shepherds and their flocks from wolves and other threats. But he said in Psalm 121, David emphasizes that our real protection comes not from men, who may fall asleep or miss the threat, but from God, who is with us always.

The priest urged us to use the hills as a reminder that we are not alone, because God walks with us and protects us everywhere. That inspiring thought comforted me during Plebe Summer and beyond. Perhaps during times of trial this Lenten Season, the hills near St. Francis will also remind you that God is always with us.



*Dr. Richard Downie has been a parishioner at St. Francis since 2018, after moving to Redondo Beach from the Washington D.C. area. He is a life-long Episcopalian and retired Army Officer. Richard currently serves on the Vestry and Stewardship Committee.*

# Wednesday, March 29

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Jeremiah 25:30-38, Psalm 119:145-176, Romans 10:14-21, John 10:1-18

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*“Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers...”* John 10:7-8

*“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”* John 10:11

I must admit that when I’ve read this scripture in the past and when I read it in preparation for this contribution, my reflex was to identify with the shepherd. The shepherd is the leader, the one that knows the sheep, the one that enters through the gate, and not the thief or robber that climbs in by some other way. We’re immersed in a society that values leaders. Indeed, of the 40 most admired people in the world last year, one was the Pope, 12 were national leaders, 6 prominent CEOs, and 4 activists leading important causes. Most of the rest were star athletes, actors, and singers revered by millions. Why wouldn’t one want to relate to the Good Shepherd, the leader, instead of the thief, or the hired hand, or the wolf, also mentioned in these passages? My initial thought was to write about how we should be like the shepherd, leading the sheep, protecting the sheep, even dying for the sheep.

However, Kristina Pelá suggested we practice *Lectio Divina* – reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating the scripture – as a guide to our writing. To my surprise, the more I engaged with these verses, the more I began to focus on the sheep. At first glance, I’d seen the sheep as mere subordinates, characters in this story meant only to react to the shepherd, the thief, or the wolf. This, of course, fits our understanding of sheep: defenseless, flocking together, and simply following a leader. Instead, I was moved to realize that the sheep were, in fact, the reason for this parable, the key players. It is the sheep that trust the shepherd, have faith in the shepherd, and follow the shepherd. Though we as Christians must sometimes lead, isn’t it the case that our essence is to be followers of Christ, because Christ is the Good Shepherd that laid down his life for us? During this Lenten season I will strive to be more like a sheep, knowing, listening to, and following the good shepherd.



*Hal Yee, Jr. and his wife Frances have been members of St Francis since 2011. Their sons, Maxwell and Matthias, were confirmed at St. Francis and are in college. Hal is blessed to have served on the Vestry this past year.*

# Thursday, March 30

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Jeremiah 26:1-16, Psalm 131 or 132, Romans 11:1-12, John 1:9-14

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*“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”*

John 1:9

John kicks off his gospel like a fast-paced novel, full of imagery and action. He immediately captures the reader’s attention with bold images of creation, contrasting light and darkness and their natural struggle, and making the point that darkness cannot overcome light. Light prevails. He then seems to abruptly transition to the story of John the Baptist, but he quickly ties this new character back to the light, saying that he was on a mission as a *witness to testify to the light*. And using that metaphor he gets to introduce the ultimate main character: Jesus. John describes Jesus’ nature, his inextricable connection with God and the divine, and His time in our world as fully human, explaining that [Jesus] was *the true light, which came to the world to enlighten everyone*.

However, with some sadness, John describes how Jesus was not readily recognized or accepted. In fact, His very own people did not accept Him, even while He was offering to all a chance to believe, step into the light, and become *children of God*. How many times do we find ourselves stuck in our ways or clinging to pre-conceived notions, and struggle to accept the truth, even when it’s clearly presented to us, plainly and vibrantly revealed, as if immersed in a bright light? Sometimes we find it very difficult to change our minds. Does that happen because we become comfortable with what we think we know to be true, or we fear the unknown, or we simply don’t want to be perceived as being mistaken? Isn’t that a form of clinging to darkness and struggling to accept the light, the light that is a metaphor for truth?

Perhaps John’s words can offer a way to set aside our earthly inclinations. John reminds us to lean on the experience of Jesus, what we know from His time in this world, what He taught about truth in this world, and what he offered to all, and strive to choose a different path by accepting Him, who was *full of grace and truth*.



*Fabrizio Pelá has been a parishioner at St. Francis for over 20 years. He and his wife Kristina enjoy participating in various aspects of parish life, connecting with the wonderful people of this blessed church community, and receiving spiritual nourishment that keeps life’s challenges in perspective.*

# Friday March 31

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Jeremiah 29:1,4-13, Psalm 95, Romans 11:13-24, John 12:1-10

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Reading through John's gospel no single phrase struck my heart, but a few things did catch my attention. Our Lord was eating supper; Martha served and Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead, now sat at the table with Him. This is the supper where Mary took very expensive oil and anointed Jesus' feet and, instead of using a cloth, she used her hair to wipe them. The house was filled with the scent of the oil which I'm sure everyone was enjoying. All except Judas Iscariot. He criticized Mary as well as Jesus, Mary for using the oil and Jesus for allowing her to use it rather than sell it. So, what caught my attention?

I wondered how Mary felt. She used very expensive oil, something I'll bet the family also treasured, and in this very peaceful setting she heard Judas griping about wasting the oil by not selling it. Did Mary feel guilty for using costly oil? John doesn't mention whether she stopped or not, but we know Jesus praised her, so she must have continued. How often have we been in a situation where we thought we were doing something kind, nice or comforting only to have someone disapprove of it? What did we do?

I wondered about Judas. Yes, we all know who he was and what he did, but I was thinking about how hard his heart had to be. In this very peaceful setting with the aromas of dinner and the scented oil filling the air, Judas does his best to ruin the moment for his own purpose. How often have we tried to make something go our way at the expense of others? I also wondered about the others at the table. John does not mention that anyone came to the defense of Jesus or Mary after Judas' criticism not even Lazarus spoke up, who John points out was there, and should have been so grateful to Our Lord for raising him from the dead. How often have we been silent when we could have supported someone?

Let us examine ourselves during this Lenten season and be more like Mary who continued her kindness and less like Judas who tried to obtain something for his own purpose. Let us be less silent and speak up for others more often.



*Mary Ann Cronin has been a member of St. Francis since 1997. She enjoys the chapel and attends the 8:00 o'clock service. She loves being a reader and enjoys the occasions when she gets to read at the 10:00 service as well. She is part of the Altar Guild and enjoys setting God's table and preparing the church for services.*

# Saturday April 1

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Jeremiah 31:27-34, Psalm 137, Romans 11:25-36, John 11:28-44 OR 12:37-50

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I suppose most people who grew up in Southern California towns near beaches in the 1970s and 80s would have to know Psalm 137 in passing, if not by heart, as I realized I do when I read it this week. Yes, the words are slightly different, but it provides the majority of the lyrics for The Melodians' 1970 version of the song "*The Rivers of Babylon*", popularized in the magnum opus of Reggae movies, "*The Harder They Come*" (1972), starring Jimmy Cliff. In truth, it was probably in college when my interest in Reggae really took off. Something about the rebelliousness of the music with its continuing themes of ending injustice and racism, resonated with my freshly-freed-from-the-constraints-of-my-military-days mind. In the Psalm, obviously, Babylon is real, not a metaphor. The Psalm refers to the Babylonian exile of Jews in the 5th century B.C. To the Rastafarians, however, "Babylon" represented the power structure that subjected them. Reggae song after song describes the plight of the poor, the displaced and the black, and draws connections between their struggle and that of ancient, Old Testament, Israel. The story of the various struggles of the Jewish nation resonates in the lives and songs of the musical artists I loved so much in my youth, but also in the songs and symbols of slaves and then former slaves in America.

Last week, I had the privilege of discussing the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. in honor of his life. No surprise here, but his speeches and writing are replete with references to the Old Testament story of the Exodus, captivity, and struggle of the nation of Israel. Black Americans have, throughout our history as a nation, seen the same parallels that Rastafarians saw with the stories of the Old Testament. Whether it was civil rights leaders in America, or musicians in Jamaica, black artists have sought what the people of Israel sought: justice. Unlike the Psalmist though, most civil rights leaders and certainly The Melodians did not want the result in the Psalm: retribution. How amazing is that? How graceful, how merciful, and how ultimately Christian it is to want justice and leave vengeance to God. We should all be so holy.



*Tim Coleman is an English teacher at Peninsula High School and has been a member of St. Francis for 8 years along with his patient wife, Julie, and his charming daughter, Alice.*



Sunday,  
April 2

Palms to  
Passion

a time to seek,  
and a time to lose;

a time to keep,  
and a time to throw away;

a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence,  
and a time to speak;

# Monday April 3

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Jeremiah 12:1-16, Psalm 51, Phil. 3:1-14, John 12:9-19

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In the 12th chapter of Jeremiah I hear the author's expression of grief to God regarding the inequity he witnesses in society as evildoers ascend to wealth while those who work to aspire to goodness suffer. In reflecting on this I found myself slightly envious of the times Jeremiah lived in. I mean it sounds so cut and dried - all the evil were rich and those who strove to be upwardly moral struggled or suffered. Would that it would be so simply defined today.

And yet I can relate just the same to Jeremiah's dilemma. Yes it's true that it's not as easy to discern good and evil as being particular to rich or not-rich. Most people could identify a rich person who they know is good, in fact I suspect there are many. But I'm aware of people not-so-well-off who are far from being a beacon of integrity. Good and evil seem to spread themselves equally across all social and financial strata in the times we live in. And yet my faith struggle with it all is the same as Jeremiah's. But let me share that that struggle for me has found its end in faith. Through faith and meditation in Christ Jesus, during the pandemic I learned to put my questions, doubts and judgements at the feet of the Lord. I do my best to refrain from looking too much to the left or the right, and am able to walk freely forward in joy and forgiveness of my own iniquity.

Speaking of personal responsibility for iniquity, Psalm 51 is a contrite prayer, in which David admits his sin and asks for God's forgiveness. And according to contextual bible history, David had amassed an epic amount of sin by the time this Psalm was written. He admits to the seriousness of his actions, but at the same time asking God for forgiveness and mercy. And, as well, petitioning God for a clean heart, that he may live anew in service and devotion.

I can relate. David's contrite plea for forgiveness and for a clean heart is a plea I made myself daily during the early days of the pandemic. I found myself mad. Not at a person, but embittered by my circumstance. And yet I soon realized that this wouldn't take me anywhere or fix anything. And with encouragement and support from my wife, I took a step back, did my best to assume a posture of humility and began to reflect on my life. On my choices, my words, my attitude.

*Contd. on next page...*

# Monday April 3

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Jeremiah 12:1-16, Psalm 51, Phil. 3:1-14, John 12:9-19

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*Contd. from previous page...*

This, coupled with meditation, eventually led me to also petition God for forgiveness, just as the author of the Psalm had done. This included asking God to help me to forgive myself for things said or done, known or unconscious, which I might have said/done to others or to myself. My testament is that God really is a forgiving God.

And then we have Paul addressing the Philippians. He is recollecting his accomplishments and prior experiences, comparing them with the overwhelming value of the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior. In this letter he clarifies how he once interpreted his religious achievements to be great assets, yet has since come to see how meaningless they are in comparison to the significance of trust in Christ Jesus.

Once again, I am in complete relation with the author Paul. As of March 1st, 2020, I thought I had accomplished quite a lot in my spiritual path and would be fortified if my faith were to be tested by a world cataclysmic event. Just like St. Paul, I quickly found that any “abilities or gifts” I thought I had attained were “made of hay”, and I was confronted with the need for the supremacy of faith in Christ Jesus. In a sense, the pandemic can be said to have done me a favor in this way. From the powerful Gospel of John comes an account of the celebration of the victorious entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, including his response to the adulation of the cheering crowd. These verses recount how a large throng greet Jesus spreading palm branches as they shout “Hosanna!” In acknowledgement of him as the Messiah. But Jesus is not impressed by the praises of the crowd and asserts his own coming death, and resurrection.

I can only wonder: in the current environment of celebrity worship, how many of us could have stayed so humble and focused on a “mission of God” while a mob shouts our praises? I question my own self about this. And that is why we are called to renounce self and revere Christ Jesus as our Lord and Savior and King.



*David Knight is organist at St. Francis and is married to Olufemi Gonsalves.*

## Tuesday, April 4

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Jeremiah 15:10-21, Psalm 6, Phil. 3:15-21, John 12:20-26

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*“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit.”* John 12:24

A couple of years ago in October I got four lush, green blueberry bushes at the nursery and planted them in our garden. When the weather got cold in December, I began to worry because they proceeded to lose all their leaves, and by January they looked quite dead. This verse made me think about all those living things that can appear to die yet keep that essence of life inside them so that at the right time they can experience rebirth and bear much fruit. In this verse from The Gospel of John Jesus used a simple metaphor to make me see that the essence of God, which all human beings carry within them, can repeatedly feed my spiritual rebirth. I know that in my life spiritual growth and new directions often require that first the old ways must die. The lush sprouts and fruit of new growth more than make up for the old me.

Jesus’ metaphor of death and rebirth also seems to be about himself. It provides me with a wonderful perspective on Holy Week. Each time I experience His death and resurrection during Holy Week I learn anew that the death of what is old is really a window for rebirth. It seems to work best to not focus on looking at this window, but to look through the window to see Jesus. After all, dying is not the end but rather a means to transform who I am. I can look for those ways and places where my life is small, isolated, empty, or closed; these are the places that need to die. Each one of these places is a grain of wheat that can produce much fruit. By letting each one of those places fall to the earth and die, I can see Jesus anew.



*Albert Zimmerman is a 25-year parishioner at St. Francis and is grateful for each of those years. He enjoys sharing complese made from the fruit of the blueberry bushes in his garden, which are reborn to magnificently bloom every year in late winter and bear much fruit.*

# Wednesday, April 5

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

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In John 12:27, Jesus is contemplating his upcoming death. It seems to me the human emotions inside him are fear and hopelessness. Yet, the spiritual, God, side of him conveys to us that he accepts what is to come. He must go forward in hope and faith.

Jesus' lesson to me in this passage is to go forward in hope and faith, though it is so difficult at times. In January, I lost my older sister, a sister who'd had a traumatic brain injury at birth which left her with lifelong intellectual and developmental issues. She didn't learn to speak until she was around 9 after many years of speech therapy. Even then, she always had speech problems.

Amazingly, as a child, five years younger than she, I had little awareness of all of this. We operated as a team, taking dance lessons together and singing and dancing in our little bedroom. We ran around the neighborhood together, joining with the other kids in outdoor games. She was my sis, my pal. Over time, of course, things changed and I gradually learned the scope of her limitations.

When I lost her in January, I found myself in dark despair. In many ways, I should have seen it coming, but I honestly didn't. I'd read all about her illnesses. Intellectually, I could see her decline, her inability to even talk to me much, though she always knew me. I hated to see her suffer, but I clung to her. In her last hours, though, I wanted to ease her suffering; I didn't want to let her go. I asked God: what could I have done differently? Why did she have to go? Since she passed away I have worked hard at acceptance. I talk to her, and she talks to me, often to show me another, better way to respond when I feel down. Hers is a message of hope and joy. Is that God talking to me through her? I think so. At Sunday service, I listen closely to the sermons, listening for the hope and love. It's still very difficult not to be discouraged and afraid of the future. But the example of Jesus shows me I can, and I must go forward; that it's possible to hold on to faith and find hope, even in the midst of darkness.



*Sue Egan is a retired English teacher who still loves to read, write and work with kids. She published her first book *Hold Up the Sky* in 2018 and will publish a tribute to her sister in 2023.*

# Maundy Thursday, April 6

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Jeremiah 20:7-11, Psalm 102, 1 Cor 10:14-17, 11:27-32, John 17:1-11

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I chose to write my Lenten Devotional about Maundy Thursday (also known as holy Thursday), as I have found the history and significance of the rituals, and the meaning of the observance, to be very spiritually moving. My family and I first learned about Maundy Thursday at St. Francis, as we had never attended a Lenten Service at any other parish. Although at the time Jesus knew he was being betrayed and that he was going to be put to death, He took this time to share with us His body and Blood that we may always be a part of God. “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). The Last Supper was a historical time for all Christians and the basis for our current practice of sharing the sacraments.

The first time we experienced the rituals I was taken aback by the foot washing and wondered why we were washing each other’s feet. Learning about the first foot washing by Jesus and the significance of it was really moving. To think that Jesus got up from the Last Supper and adorned himself in a towel to wash the feet of his disciples proved to be a gesture of great significance to me. Not only did He stoop, Himself, to be a servant to them, but He assured them that by doing this He was cleansing their souls from sin and asking them to be servants to each other as well. I found it meaningful in that Jesus shows us that we are all equal, and only God is greater than the rest of us. “The Lord is with me like a mighty warrior” (Jeremiah 20:11), also gives us faith and hope for a mankind of genuine care and concern for each other.



*Sue Ferme and her husband Jack are blessed to be proud parents, grandparents, and now great grandparents. With 90% of their family now in Texas, they find themselves there more often. St. Francis has become their family now, and they are so grateful to be part of this parish*

# The Triduum

a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.



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## Good Friday, April 7

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Genesis 22:1-14, Psalm 22, 1 Peter 1:10-20, John 13:36-38 OR John 19:38-42

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*“...set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when He is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct;” 1 Peter 1:13*

*“You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish.” 1 Peter 1:18*

Why is this very sad and tumultuous day as Jesus is tried, sentenced to death, and hanged called “good”? Scholars have come up with various possibilities, including: (1) “good” is an aberration of “God”; (2) (more widely accepted) that ultimate good comes from the son of God dying to absolve believers from their sins, thus giving us the hope of salvation and grace. This redemption elsewhere in the New Testament is referred to as the Good News.

In today’s passage from Genesis, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, to prove his obedience. The Psalm begins: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, which foretells the words Jesus later speaks from the cross. The first passage from John’s Gospel quotes Jesus’ conversation with the disciples at the Last Supper where he says that He is going to a place where they cannot follow Him,

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# Good Friday, April 7

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Genesis 22:1-14, Psalm 22, 1 Peter 1:10-20, John 13:36-38 OR John 19:38-42

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*Contd. from previous page...*

and the second, after a detailed description of Jesus' trial and death, he recounts Joseph of Arimathea obtaining Pilate's permission to bury Jesus' body. All these situations feel much more dispiriting than "good".

Conversely, in his first letter the apostle Peter focuses on the grace that we receive as a result of Christ's sacrifice on the cross: ". . . set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, . . . be holy in all your conduct . . . You know that you were ransomed from your futile ways . . . with the precious blood of Christ . . ." This reminds me of the times I have read scriptures in our 8:00 services that mention that we have been "adopted" into the family of God. What a marvelous concept: we are God's adopted children!

I have an adopted granddaughter and know what it is to love and cherish her in our family and, of course, we all will do anything for her to help her grow and flourish. And here we Christians are reminded that God cherishes us as much as (or even more than) human parents can. What amazing Good News that is!



*Laurie Anderson joined St. Francis when Fr. Dean Farrar was rector and has served on the vestry twice. She is a reader and greeter at the 8:00 service and was formerly also a chalice bearer and lay Eucharistic minister.*

# Holy Saturday, April 8

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Job 19:21-27a, Psalm 88, Hebrews 4:1-16, Romans 8:1-11

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*“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:15-16*

I have long thought that the early months of the year provide two opportunities to set us up for failure. First come those New Year resolutions that, surely, we will stick to this year, only to find that they are no match for the dullness and short days of January. And next comes Lent, when, surely, this is the year we will keep our promise to give up some little luxury, or be more faithful in our daily practice, more mindful of our faith.

Well, it’s Holy Saturday. How did we do?

If you are like me, and somewhat given to introspection, this question might be one that nags. Well, how *did* I do? Did I keep Lent well? On a scale of one to ten... Have I been a good enough Christian? Am I worthy? How can I claim to be a good Christian with any sense of confidence?

The words from Hebrews provide comfort. We have a high priest who is able to empathize with our weakness (to remove the double-negative from the text!), who has been tempted in every way, just as we are. This is someone that gets us. Has been there. Understands that it is difficult and that, ultimately, yes, we’ll fail. “... - yet he did not sin” doesn’t mean we won’t.

So maybe, as we stand today on the divide between the seasons of Lent and Easter, we can take one last look back, not in judgment of ourselves, but with the view that we are human, we have our weaknesses, we are tempted in every way and, yes, we fall into sin. Let us live in that reality. We are flawed, and that’s just fine. We can be our own worst critics, but in Jesus we have our own greatest supporter.

And then, as tonight rolls around, and we step out of the darkness into the Light, and shout jubilantly “He is Risen”, and restore the Alleluias we buried on Ash Wednesday, let us move on and “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence”. With confidence.

*Happy Easter!*

*Peter Marshall is a former (physically, if not spiritually!) member of St Francis.*

Easter Sunday,  
April 9

## Everything Has Its Time

For everything there is a season,  
and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

a time to throw away stones,  
and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

A Time for Joy!

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Sunday Quotes - Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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