

YORK COUNTY MINISTERS (YCM)
2021
LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

*Reflections and Prayers from the Beginning,
God's creation of the world and its life.*

Genesis 1 and 2:1-7, 18-25
based upon the (Authorized) King James Version

A Lenten offering from:

Christ the King Episcopal Church
Crooks Memorial United Methodist Church
Grace Episcopal Church
Providence United Methodist Church
St Luke's United Methodist Church
St Mark Lutheran Church
Vineyard Church of the Peninsula
Zion United Methodist Church

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 17, 2021

***In the beginning God created
the heaven and the earth.***

—Genesis 1:1

Reading this verse, what comes to mind is not only the beginning of creation, but new beginnings. Over the years, I've had many opportunities to go through difficult life trials. Certainly, these growing pains are not fun in the thick of things. However, when I look back, I am amazed at the things God has faithfully brought me through. I can confidently say in my old age that these life experiences have brought many new-heart-beginnings, starting with the day that I met Jesus.

It was approximately 2:00am, October 18, 1978, just a couple of weeks after my eighteenth birthday. A friend had been telling me about Jesus for a couple of months. That evening, she took me to a mutual friend's home where they worshipped and talked about Jesus with a passion I had never seen. As we were leaving their home, I turned to my friend and asked her how I could know Jesus. She shared that I simply needed to ask Jesus for forgiveness and invite Him to come into my heart, then guided me in the sinner's prayer. Instantly, I was made new, bursting at the seams with joy! My deep hopelessness was gone. I ran up and down the streets yelling, "Yay Jesus!!!! Yayyyyy!!!!!!!" at the top of my lungs. I didn't yet know things like, "Praise the Lord!" or "Thank you Jesus!" I laughed and screamed and cried. Thankfully, no one called the police! ☺

In the beginning (of my walk with Jesus), God created a new heart inside of me. He saved me from my sin, from horrible emotional pain, from wanting to die, from the deepest, darkest grave that my enemy had dug for me. Because of Jesus, I was (and am) a new creation, a "Genesis 1:1-of-the-heart" creation.

Father, I give you thanks for saving me from the terrible grave of sin through the sacrifice of your Son Jesus. Forgive me for often forgetting the greatest gift you have given to each of us, the gift of new life, the gift of friendship with your son Jesus, the gift of intimacy with you, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Only you could take someone like me and make them holy. Only you can see beauty where others see worthlessness. Only you could love a sinner like me and create a new heaven and new earth in their heart, soul, and mind. Thank you for giving us such magnificent hope in this broken world. Lead us to love others into your Kingdom. Help us to multiply your great love by bringing it to others. You are the hope of the nations. Blessed be your holy name! Amen!

—Amelia Avila, Vineyard Church of the Peninsula

2nd DAY OF LENT

February 18, 2021

*And the earth was without form, and void;
and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

—Genesis 1:2

Master of the Universe, it is in awe that we contemplate that out of emptiness you created this planet earth. Out of darkness and cold you created the sun and moon to bring light and warmth. Out of nothing you created the seas and land and all creatures that inhabit them. Most humbly we contemplate that it was by your love that we were created. May we always remember that through you all creation is our brother and our sister.

Master of the Universe, it was your desire that we live in peace and harmony with each other and all creation. Yet in our selfishness we, as individuals, peoples, and nations, have turned against each by word and action. May we always remember that to live in your grace means to express peace and love.

Master of the Universe, through your blessings we live in bounty and yet all around us there are those who suffer from sickness, loneliness, poverty, injustice, prejudice, homelessness, and imprisonment. May we always remember that fruits of our lives are not ours, that it is in giving that we receive.

Master of the Universe, all creation is yours — trees and seas, fish and animals, and male or female, black, brown or white. May we never forget that we are one. Prayers and songs of praise and thanksgiving are raised to you from synagogue, mosque, temple and church. May we never forget to give you praise, thanks and awe. In all humbleness we pray for a deepening of our faith, hope, understanding, courage and forgiving. In all things may we always remember to be an instrument of your peace and love.

Most holy and blessed Father and Mother, God of all creation: with the saints and angels in heaven, we praise your Holy Name. Grant us the freedom to laugh, the courage to cry, the heart to be open, and the faith to believe. Heal our hearts and open them so we may be faithful to one another. In your forgiveness we seek new beginnings. In your generosity we seek what is best for one another. In your grace we seek freedom from diverseness. In your faithfulness we seek wisdom for understanding. We praise you for the harvest and for the assurance of food and drink. While we enjoy the bounty given to us, let us not forget to share our abundance with those who are hungry and poor. Grant to us the strength and courage to commit to the truth. Most holy and blessed Father and Mother, God of all creation: Amen.

—Gerry Smelt, Grace Episcopal Church

3rd DAY OF LENT

February 19, 2021

***And God said, Let there be light:
and there was light.***

—Genesis 1:3

“Through Him (Jesus) all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind” (John 1: 3-4).

God is light — light that gives us peace, even during the turbulent times in our lives. I recently had a procedure at a local outpatient facility — purely routine with good results — and found that it is possible to encounter God and experience His peace, even lying on a cold table in a hospital gown in a brightly lit room with lots of people scurrying around, waiting for the sedative to drift off — to experience God — to be reminded and accept the fact that our lives are in his hands — and that we can have peace in all circumstances — even though we do not know what tomorrow may bring — we can have confidence that we will pass through this life and on to the next encompassed by His love to live in peace with him now and for all eternity.

This is the message we have heard from him: “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-8).

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you that you for filling us up with your light so that we can share your love with the world. We know, Lord, that darkness cannot exist in the presence of light. We thank you, Lord, that in our heavenly dwelling place there will be no more night. We thank you that we will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for you will be our light (Revelation 22:5). We thank you that you remind us that a town built on a hill should not be hidden. And neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket (Matthew 5). We pray, Lord, that you fill us up with the power of the Holy Spirit to put our light on its stand, to shine brightly and give light to everyone you bring into our paths. We pray, Lord, that the light of Jesus will shine through us so and glorify you, our Father in heaven. In Jesus’ precious and holy name, we pray, amen.

—Andy Landrum, Providence United Methodist Church

4th DAY OF LENT

February 20, 2021

***And God saw the light, that it was good:
and God divided the light from the darkness.***

—Genesis 1:4

In separating darkness from light, God was doing something positive, allowing us better to understand our world, to see and to interact with God's wonderful creation. It also gave us a sense of time and taught us to measure our days.

But for a year, the word "separation" has had nothing but bad connotations for us, as we have been separated from family and friends, and our work and church communities. Even the political divisions recently have grown even wider.

This negative aspect of separation was not unfamiliar to Jesus, whose culture was much more divided than ours: sinner from righteous, Gentile from Jew, sick from well, and on and on. But Jesus understood that when humanity is separated from one another, it is separated from God. So we read how Jesus reached out to old and young, to Gentile and sinner, to sick and outcast, because nobody should feel separated from their Creator.

Having felt the isolation of the past year, we long to have our sense of community revived. So we look forward to a future when our hugs will last a little longer, our smiles a little broader, our gratitude a little stronger, and our criticisms a little softer. That's why now is an especially good time to remember Paul's words in Romans 8, that "nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus...neither the present nor the future."

Loving Father, give me understanding for those I disagree with. Help me to find new ways to reach out to others, and so dispel my own loneliness. Remove me from momentary temptations, that I may feel your loving presence. In short, please God, help me to separate myself from everything that weighs me down, that I can better love and serve you. Amen.

—Jim Pile, Crooks Memorial United Methodist Church

1st SUNDAY IN LENT

February 21, 2021

*And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.
And the evening and the morning were the first day.*

—Genesis 1:5

God's Creation. Such a familiar Scripture to us all. The words have almost become like a favorite bedtime story, or maybe a poem, or hymn, or love story. It is the description of the Almighty creating things that we see and experience each and every day.

As we read the Creation narrative again this year, it should once again bring us great comfort in remembering that the God we worship is one that demonstrates love us in so many differing ways. Some of the ways may be more visible and breath-taking than others, but collectively that love is what makes us grow in our faith.

In this particular passage, there are a couple of important items to note. First, this Scripture begins with the word "and." We should recognize that this is not the beginning of Creation, nor is it the end. God has been creating, is creating, and will be creating. In other words, God always was, God is, and God always will be. Regardless of the trials and tribulations in our life, we should take comfort in remembering that God is with us, always has and always will be.

Secondly, God called the brightness "Day" and the darkness "Night." Once again, this should give us comfort. God is in the light and in the darkness. We just have to humble ourselves and seek God in our midst, whether we feel we are in the light of goodness or the darkness of badness, God is with us.

In this season of Lent, let us rejoice in God's love.

Lord, help us keep our focus on your greatest gift Jesus, so that we will always remember your grace in our daily lives.

—the Rev David Magruder, Zion United Methodist Church

5th DAY OF LENT

February 22, 2021

***And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters,
and let it divide the waters from the waters.***

—Genesis 1:6

“What is amazing about how God makes earth’s atmosphere and the air we breathe?” God makes it amazing. Powers, creatures and animals, and the air we breathe and atmosphere. God is the only one who can do it and that is something that makes God special — like each of us has something special about us. Atmosphere is the air we breathe, so it is very special, because it has all the things we need, and all the things that plants need to live. God was taking care of us. An earth with no atmosphere would not be very helpful, we couldn’t breathe and plants would not survive. The earth would be like all the other planets and have no living things.

God made earth special, it stands out from all the other planets, because there is a place for us and other living creatures. God has made our planet have different phases for days and nights. In outer space, it’s all dark and that can be very calming and pleasing. But sometimes, the dark can scare you and bring back non-happy memories. When you are in the dark, you can remember losses and whenever you have gotten hurt very badly, but there are still sparks of light, like remembering, from those things, you can still know that God is with you, and in bad things, God can bring hope.

From outer space you can learn about the world and other planets. You can learn about what God made, and creations of the earth. It’s cool that you can see planets and their colors. You can see how many craters are on the moon — so much detail in such a huge space. If there was no outer space, I would miss the moon and the sun. I would also miss the miraculous stars. I would miss the beauty of the glowing moon at night and I would miss the bright sun in the morning. And I would miss seeing all the stars reminding me of friendship and reminding me that they are all together.

Think about how earth and outer space are neighbors. Think about who lives next to you — you guys are friends, you don’t always fight, you live peacefully side by side. Friends live peacefully, and so does the earth and outer space. They are friends and the same — they don’t fight. God is telling us that even if you don’t always agree, you can still live peacefully.

Lord, thank you for making outer space and our atmosphere beautiful and for making them friends. They work together, keeping us alive and providing us light from the sun and darkness at night. It’s all beautiful and you created it that way. Amen.

—Galilee Neubauer (age 7), St Mark Lutheran Church

6th DAY OF LENT

February 23, 2021

***And God made the firmament,
and divided the waters which were under the firmament
from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.***

—Genesis 1:7

“And God made the expanse and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so” (NASB 1997).

The Expanse is a Sci-Fi program I have enjoyed for the last five years or so. It is set in space, as are most things within the genre. The vastness of space: outer space is unfathomable to me, yet somehow the cinematography is done in such a way as to give the viewer some idea. Space seems to go on forever. There are scenes in the show where a character has been left alone with only the suit to protect them and whatever oxygen they have available in the suit to keep them alive. I find that a scary proposition. Praise God, that in His infinite Wisdom, in His Planning, and in His Creation, He provided for us a “safe place” within the Greater Expanse of space with an Expanse in which we can not only Survive but Thrive. There is an infinite expanse outside the atmosphere of the Earth. There is no oxygen to breathe and no protection from the radiation emitted by the Sun but before He made us, He made a place for us. We are safe in the shelter of His wings. We are safe, hidden in the cleft of the Rock.

Heavenly Father, I praise You because of Who You are. You are Creator God, Maker of heaven and earth and everything that has been made. In Your Love, You made me and knit me together and formed me after You first thought of me. You know what I need to live. You have told me not to worry or be concerned about what I eat or what I wear. You have and You will provide for me. In this life, regardless of my circumstance, You have made a place for me. You are my Shield from the fiery arrows of the accuser. You are the Solid Rock upon which I stand when my footing becomes unsure. You are my Anchor who keeps me moored when the most violent storms arise. You are my Bread. You are my Living Water. You are my Place in this world. All praise, honor, and glory be Yours, by the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

—Keith Caughlin, Vineyard Church of the Peninsula

7th DAY OF LENT

February 24, 2021

*And God called the firmament Heaven.
And the evening and the morning were the second day.*

—Genesis 1:8

As I read this sentence, I can almost feel God's excitement.

Talk about a creative project: The light had just the day before been brought out of the dark, the night from the day, and the water had now been separated from water ... sky.

I can imagine God's anticipation entering into "Day Two" as She considered the good things to come, the possibilities.

I recall the "Day Twos" of my life — often anxious days: summer camp as a child, college freshman year, a sought-after new job and overwhelmed with self-doubt.

"Day Twos" are where anxiety and hope lie, just before the real action begins.

I wonder if God felt the anxiety — if He knew how in the creation of humankind that He would be both delighted and saddened. But She kept creating anyway ... more days to come.

If only we could stop long enough, pause from our anxiety or our grasping ego reactivity to absorb all that has gone before to form a path of steps and choices — a map even, to our better selves. If we could pause, we would know that these "Day Twos" have been born out of miracles and Our Loving God is waiting with us to embrace the life of the day ahead. "Day Twos" call us to take a risk, to dive in and to Be all that we are called to Be.

Dear Loving Creator God, we thank You, we love You, we worship You. We humbly acknowledge that because we forget who we really are, we react in fear and greed. We turn against you and we turn against each other; we willfully bring harm to this "fragile earth, our island home" that you have entrusted to us. As we ask for forgiveness, open our minds to this "Our Day Two" — that we may live in Trust with You as our Guide. Amen.

—Caroline Griffith, Grace Episcopal Church
prayer quotes from the Book of Common Prayer

8TH DAY OF LENT

February 25, 2021

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.

—Genesis 1:9

It seems to me that most of the creation story concerns itself with the separation of things.

The verse today describes the separation of water and dry land. Often times we view division and separation as a bad thing, especially in our most recent history. Perhaps some separation can be a good thing. After all, what would the world be like if it was all land, or all water?

Perhaps we should not rush to judgement. It just might be that God knows what God is doing. And after all God said it was good.

As we find ourselves in the season of Lent, perhaps we need to spend more time in quiet meditation discovering God's presence in our lives rather than trying to understand what God is doing.

Most gracious God, enable us to see more clearly what you are doing in our midst. Help us to see the world around us through your eyes. Amen.

—the Rev David Hampton (retired), St Luke's United Methodist Church

9TH DAY OF LENT

February 26, 2021

***And God called the dry land Earth;
and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas:
and God saw that it was good.***

—Genesis 1:10

I am a sailor by default. While growing up in a small farming area, boating and water sports were not in my vocabulary. However, when I married my husband, the son of a sailor, my life quickly changed. The waters called the seas soon became a place where I loved to be. I quickly learned the seas can be calm, boisterous, dangerous, and downright frightening. Weather conditions can turn on a dime. I learned the seas must be respected.

We begin our Lenten journey on this dry land. In the beginning the gathering together of the waters reminds us of our Baptism. In the words of our Lutheran liturgical tradition, “In Holy Baptism our gracious heavenly Father liberates us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are reborn children of God and inheritors of eternal life.”

These forty days are about prayer, forgiveness, and healing. We are to ask ourselves how can I change, what can I do to improve who I am, where can I go to share the Gospel, how can I help my fellow man to see Christ in me? In Baptism we are given a new life. Our sins are washed away, and we are cleansed by this water and brought into a relationship with the One who sent Jesus our Savior.

Near the end of a Baptism in our Lutheran tradition the pastor says, “Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.” A lighted candle is then given to the person and the pastor says, “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

And God saw that it was good.

Almighty Father, grant that we who have been redeemed from sin by Baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus, be renewed in your Holy Spirit to live in righteousness and truth.

*“Eternal Father strong to save, whose arm has bound the restless wave,
“Who bade the mighty ocean deep, its own appointed limits keep:
“Oh, hear us when we cry to thee, glad hymns and praise from land and sea.” Amen.*

—Sandy Hopkins, St Mark Lutheran Church
with prayer quoting William Whiting

10TH DAY OF LENT

February 27, 2021

***And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass,
the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind,
whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.***

—Genesis 1:11

God creates in such a manner that it is designed to sustain itself and even to flourish. Too often it seems that we read the Creation narrative as if everything was created only for the purpose of humanity. When we read Scripture closer, however, we can better recognize that God's creation is for God's Kingdom here on earth.

The grass can be seen as a relaxing and comfortable space for humanity as well as other living creatures. It has life sustaining qualities for Creation. The herbs and fruit are also to be enjoyed by all of life that is on earth. The seed which is needed for future growth and prosperity of all of God's creation is also a part of the Creation narrative that we need to recognize and appreciate.

As we embrace the wholeness of Creation, the fullness of what God is creating for humanity and for creatures, then we should develop a greater appreciation and respect for it all. We should better recognize that since the beginning God has been providing for us in a loving and caring manner.

As we make our journey through Lent, as we move toward the Cross of Resurrection, let us examine our own relationship with God through Christ. Are we treating all of God's creation with the respect that God intended? How can we better appreciate the earth in a loving and graceful relationship? How can we become more purposeful in our discipleship?

Gracious God, throughout these days of Lent, help us cleanse our hearts of all that is not holy. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

—the Rev David Magruder, Zion United Methodist Church

2nd SUNDAY IN LENT

February 28, 2021

***And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind,
and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind:
and God saw that it was good.***

—Genesis 1:12

God in his abundance provides diversity in the plants of the earth are part of creation. Grasses, herbs and fruit trees are created to cover the earth. The soil has just been revealed by the receding waters, and it produces fruit and seed. The barren landscape becomes green and vibrant. By God's will it generates seed, fruit and food for the subsequent creation of the living creatures that are part of his plan.

In our own spiritual lives, we find ourselves freed from sin and relieved of burdens. It is like the receding waters in creation. Something is revealed, but we don't know what to do with it. God in his providence had given us all we need to grow and be fruitful. So we ask ourselves, "What does this growth look like for me?"

Creation is diverse, and so are the ways we grow and sustain ourselves. We are created to be the ground cover that holds the soil in place for our faith communities. We are blessed to have the opportunity to provide seasoning and spice to the lives of others. By grace we generate fruit.

The ways in which we live as Christians can be complex and varied. It is important to remember that God has given us what we need. We receive many things as part of creation, and we have much at our disposal. There is a temptation to take and not give, but living in the faith is not a passive experience. We grow in the faith, provide for others, and make possible the ongoing work of the Kingdom.

We are part of creation ourselves, and there are lessons for us in the plants.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the abundance of creation, and we ask you to give us an awareness of your plan as we grow in the faith and exercise our gifts. Help us to learn from the plants you have given us and be productive, healthy citizens of the Kingdom. Amen.

—the Rev Thomas E Haynes, Christ the King Episcopal Church

11th DAY OF LENT

March 1, 2021

And the evening and the morning were the third day.

—Genesis 1:13

At the end of the third day, the work of creation is half finished. God has spoken into existence the plants and trees. He has provided light and has separated the land from the water. Creation is now sustainable with seeds to continue the life that has been put in place. Fruit is being produced. Creation is not complete, but in some ways it might look as if it is a good stopping point.

In our spiritual lives, sometimes we decide things are “good enough.” We have reached a point that seems to be working for us, and we go into a holding pattern. The problem is that God’s work in us is not complete.

So how do we break out of the holding pattern and live into the fullness of God’s plan for us? This is a question we should probably ask ourselves, and Lent is a time for self-examination. It is when we are reminded to ask ourselves these very questions.

On Ash Wednesday, the liturgy at my church included these words: “I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word. And, to make a right beginning of repentance....”

The “right beginning” is to understand we need to repent and begin that process. There is some cultural sense that repentance involves saying “my bad” and having some remorse. True repentance is more than that. Repentance is more than realizing we are going the wrong direction on the toll road. We have to exit the toll road, pay the toll, and start going in the right direction. The longer we wait, the longer it will take to be back where we are supposed to be.

Beware of that holding pattern!

O God, we pray for penitent hearts and for the strength to fearlessly face the ways we have fallen short of your will for us. Give us courage to align our wills with yours and not be satisfied with “good enough.” We give thanks for the many ways you have provided for us and by grace hope to live according to your will. We pray all this in Christ’s name. Amen.

—the Rev Thomas E Haynes, Christ the King Episcopal Church

12th DAY OF LENT

March 2, 2021

***And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven
to divide the day from the night;
and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.***

—Genesis 1:14

How marvelously creative is our God! Many of us turned our eyes not so long ago to the pre-Christmas skies to watch for the Great Conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter. It was a sight that only comes so often but brings awe and wonder each time. Some of us have been blessed to see the Aurora Borealis with its shimmering waves of color glowing in the night sky. God did not need to give us such beauty like this. Nor did God need to give us the turning of leaves to mark the fall or the brightly colored tulips as signs of spring. Seasons of growth, rest, renewal, and abundance.

In these words from Genesis we see the intentional act of what we likely take for granted, the marking of time. With this marking comes promise. We will never dwell too long in the cold of winter or the dark of night. Rather daylight comes each day and signs of new life come with spring. These promises hold true in the seasons of our lives. Life itself is marked by time, the journey of new life to “new life” as we come to know Christ and rest in God’s eternal promises. We experience seasons of growth, rest, renewal, and abundance. Though some days, months, or seasons may be rougher than others, we know another is coming that brings potential for something new and beautiful. What are you most thankful for in this current season of your journey?

Lord of all time and everyone season, thank you for the beauty of creation. You provide means to mark our time while we are on this earth. Don’t let us simply watch that time go by but rather seek your beauty and gifts in each day, month, and season. Be with us when it is harder for us to see and remind us of your great promise for a new thing to come. Continue to carry us on this journey we call life and let us continually seek your ways. Amen.

—the Rev Lisa Barbery, Crooks Memorial United Methodist Church

13th DAY OF LENT

March 3, 2021

***And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven
to give light upon the earth: and it was so.***

—Genesis 1:15

Light is so important in our lives, by it we see where to go and not fall. Light and heat from the sun helps provide food, heat, and meets many of our daily needs.

In the New Testament Jesus spoke that *he* is the light of the world; anyone who follows him will not “walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Jesus Christ is our light, the light of life.

As we trust Christ to lead us, he lights the way forward for us as we step out. Not before we step, but as we step forward: as we step up to a task he is calling us to do; as we step into the work he is giving us to do; as we step out of our comfort zone into something new and different or unknown. Amid unprecedented times, as we face unknown territory of a pandemic, many are suffering losses too numerous to mention here. However, there is the light of Christ to give us hope, to lead us in the steps we take.

As the old hymn “Footsteps of Jesus” reminds us:

Sweetly Lord have we heard thee calling, “Come Follow me!
And we see where thy footprints falling lead us to thee.
Footprints of Jesus that make the pathway glow;
We will follow the steps of Jesus where e’er they go.

God, let us be encouraged today to allow the light of Christ shine in our heart, mind, and emotions, and to follow the lighted path God has placed before us to step up, step in, step out during this unprecedented time. Amen.

—the Rev Frank Ferguson, Providence United Methodist Church

14th DAY OF LENT

March 4, 2021

***And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day,
and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also..***

—Genesis 1:16

At first blush, the immense universe created by God is mentioned here only in a brief phrase: “and God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night.” Ho hum. But wait! There’s more! There’s so much more to be revealed in this verse. *The greater light rules.* This is God’s word to His children-to-be that this object is not a thing to be worshipped. Instead, the sun (the greater light) is to be regarded as an amazing example of God’s power. When God created the sun, He set the stage for humankind to be able to celebrate seasons, plant and harvest crops, measure time and experience joy at every sunrise and sunset. Ah, and the moon! The lesser light that rules the night. The moon that by His making, will bathe the world in a silver light. Now, because of the moon, the nocturnal creatures that God will form later can forage at night, and the ocean tides will exert their pull. Because of the moon, humankind will create oral folklore about it, be inspired to write books, poetry, and music lauding it. And, in time, venture there and walk about upon its surface. How great Thou art!

Genesis 1:16 ends with a profound understatement that God “made the stars.” And yet, when we gaze heavenward at night and the immense universe is displayed all around us, we are humbled, amazed and worshipful. What an incredible display of His power and love are the stars! What comes to mind immediately when stargazing is the fact that it was a star that led the Magi to the manger where the newborn Christ lay. By the Creator’s design, our view of the heavens inspires us to worship Him because of “the immensity and beauty of what He has made” (Psalm 19:1).

Our Heavenly Father, we pray that we will never cease to be awed by Your power to create. We humbly ask for Your guidance as we carry out our stewardship of this world You so lovingly formed and gifted to us. In the name of our Lord and Creator, amen.

—Carol MacDonald, Vineyard Church of the Peninsula

15th DAY OF LENT

March 5, 2021

***And God set them in the firmament of the heaven
to give light upon the earth...***

—Genesis 1:17

I have been thinking about this verse a lot. We have heard, earlier in Genesis, how on the fourth day God made the “great lights” to rule the day and the night, and what he called them. And, oh yes, God made the stars, as well. We learn that these lights govern the days and the seasons, as anyone who observes the sky can tell from the differences in the length of days and the position of the sun as the earth travels around it.

This verse, however, tells me *why* God “set them in the firmament of the heaven.” It was to give light upon the earth.

The first word God spoke in Genesis 1 was “Let there be light.” Light was so important to the Creator that he spoke it into being first thing. In fact, in the first letter from John the Apostle, he says, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” “Light” is the primary focus of this verse. But there is a secondary focus: “to give.” Before humanity even existed, God provided an earth with light, growing things, water, and animals. Our God is a giving God. The letter from James tells us that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.”

When I walk in the world God created, I use the light he provided to make photographs of his creation. When I do, I give thanks to “the Father of lights” for his good and perfect gifts to me. On this fifteenth day of Lent, let’s think on God’s gift of light to the earth and to us.

Gracious Father of Lights, thank you for all your good gifts, especially for the gift of light. Not only is it necessary for survival, but it is beautiful in itself, and helps us to see the other wonders of your creation. Forgive us when we complain, for we tend to do a lot of that, especially in these days. Help us to turn our eyes to you and to know that you give us whatever we need. Help us to walk in the light, as you are in the light, that we might have fellowship with one another and with you. In the precious name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

—JoAnne Rawls, St Mark Lutheran Church

16th DAY OF LENT

March 6, 2021

***And to rule over the day and over the night,
and to divide the light from the darkness:
and God saw that it was good.***

—Genesis 1:18

Every day as I was growing up, my mom would ask me “How was your day?” when I came home from school. Some days I would excitedly tell her all the good things that happened and others I would recall every painful detail of how bad it was. On particularly bad days my mom would gently remind me that I wouldn’t necessarily appreciate the good days as much if I didn’t have bad ones every now and then.

In today’s verse we are reminded that night and day were separated by the amount of light and dark they contained. Amazingly God sees them both and calls them good. As we walk through this season of Lent, I am reminded that we would not understand the gift of a feast without the experience of a fast.

Although most of our life is not solidly in the dark or the light, it is helpful in our faith to notice when things change and reflect. When we take a moment to notice the subtle changes within our spirit, we catch more of the good God is intending for us. This is important because without recognizing the light of day turning to the dark of night, we miss sunsets and all the magnificent hues they bring.

God of Sun and Moon, help us to stay awake to the subtle changes of light in our lives so that we too may look at both and see the good. Amen.

—the Rev Ashley B Isernhagen, St Luke’s United Methodist Church

3rd SUNDAY IN LENT

March 7, 2021

And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

—Genesis 1:19

“Evening passed” — What a hopeful sentence this can be. In the middle of the night, when you’re wide awake and worried about what tomorrow might bring or the mistakes you made the day before, you just want to return to sleep and let the evening pass. The psalmist identifies with us: “In times of trouble I pray to the Lord all night long. I lift my hands in prayer, but I cannot find comfort” (Psalm 77:2). “Night” can be more than a metaphor for our troubles: it’s literally a time when our anxieties can ruin a good night’s sleep.

Yet God intended for night to be a time of rejuvenation, when our minds and bodies and spirits renew themselves. The Jewish day always begins at sundown; when the work of the day is completed, families gather, thank God, and enjoy a meal. In particular, our spirits will be renewed if we take the time to pray before we sleep — to ask forgiveness for regrets of the day, to pray for those on our hearts, to thank God for seeing us through the events of the day and to seek God’s wisdom and strength for challenges to come. In other words, to put everything on our minds in God’s hands, trusting in his love and care. In so doing, we prepare ourselves for the night ahead, which will in turn prepare us for tomorrow’s tasks.

For it was also the psalmist who wrote, “Tears may flow in the night, but joy comes in the morning.”

O God, each night let me prepare my soul and body, as I reflect on your presence in my life — how your strength has carried me through the day and how your care will watch over me at night. Let me lay down the burdens of the day, trusting in your love for me so that I can rest peacefully, secure in your loving arms. Then let me joyfully arise in the morning, aware that your presence will sustain me throughout the day. With Christ always reminding us of the fullness of you, we pray these things. Amen.

—Jim Pile, Crooks Memorial United Methodist Church

17th DAY OF LENT

March 8, 2021

***And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly
the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth
in the open firmament of heaven.***

—Genesis 1:20

Shortly before we entered Lent, I stumbled on an article about whales — a new species, to be specific, that dwells in the deep canyons of the northern Gulf of Mexico. These are not small porpoises that have hidden from scientific view like specks of dust in the dark corners of earth's central seas. They are huge: measuring more than forty feet, weighing more than the pair of elephants on Noah's ark. They are our national neighbors, described as a "uniquely American" whale, just off the coast of Alabama. Fewer than one hundred are known to swim on earth, perhaps as few as only several dozen. For as long as we have sailed beside them, we have mistaken them for something else: whalers and watchers and witnesses would see the sleek lines of their backs breaking the surface, mistaking them for other better-known rorquals: a sei whale? a fin whale? a Bryde's whale?

A handful of bones have been examined; and not too long ago in western Florida, a carcass washed ashore that afforded a glimpse into these lifeforms, these moving creatures brought forth from the waters. They seem to be closest cousins with a far-away beast of the Indo-Pacific, so aptly named for this devotion: Eden's whale. Now Eden's cousin, our American friend, is known and named: "Rice's Whale" reveals God's still-to-be-found creation.

It is holy and humbling to meet anew co-creations of the Lord of our generous genesis. Our seas and skies still team with life that is new to our knowledge, each piece revealing a more expansive creation than we had known our God has given for our natural environment. In Eden's cousins, we continue to honor the holy cosmos our Christ reconciles by his cross.

Now let us learn from waters, Lord, new secrets of your mind. Upon the wings of heaven, Lord, new angels let us find: new messengers of gospel reach; new wisdom you prepare to teach: your holy life for all, for each, as one with humankind. But should we learn from waters, Lord, as Pilate washed his hands, to clip the wings of heaven, Lord, and wash your love's commands from holding us to love the same, then clothe with grace our naked shame till, with your world, we too proclaim the praise your life expands. And let us learn from waters, Lord, this life you wash in grace, as on the wings of heaven, Lord, you raise our hope to face all things in Jesus reconciled, things known and not, things tame and wild, God's ancient beast, God's holy child, in Jesus' sure embrace. Amen.

—the Rev Joel Neubauer (editor), St Mark Lutheran Church

18th DAY OF LENT

March 9, 2021

***And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth,
which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind,
and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.***

—Genesis 1:21

I find it amazing and so inspiring to find something new and even more incredible each time I read the Bible. When we read the words slowly, pause every once in a while, to reflect and to pray over one verse at a time, we can discover the work of God in so many ways.

This verse today helps us understand how massive some of the living creatures are that God created. But it also demonstrates the beauty of the creatures that are very small. Think about the small birds and their intricate frames and structure. What a contrast that is to the mammoth frames of the whales. All of these creatures have been created by God for the purpose of God's Kingdom. As this verse concludes, it tells us that God "saw it was good."

God can see things to a greater degree than we can. This should give us confidence and comfort that God can see things that we do not, and all we need to do is appreciate what God has created and seek ways to serve. In dedicating our lives to Kingdom building, as disciples of Christ, we can see with our hearts the work of God in and through everything.

Let us be open to God's work in our lives and the lives of others as we continue our Lenten journey. Let us also examine how we are living into the "good" that God has created and maybe more importantly, how we are sharing that good with others.

Loving God, help us in growing in our faith to more readily receive your graceful gifts. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

—the Rev David Magruder, Zion United Methodist Church

19th DAY OF LENT

March 10, 2021

***And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply,
and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.***

—Genesis 1:22

God directed the creatures of the sea and the birds of the air to be fruitful and multiply. At face value this command implies we are to have children and populate the earth. Delving deeper into its meaning, it also applies to the way we live our daily lives. To be faithful children of God we must live lives that serve to transform society and its structures in ways that reflect God's love. To do this we must grow not only in our understanding of the words of the prophets, but also in our understanding of the wisdom of Jesus and acceptance of the universal Christ. Opening our hearts to this wisdom will allow changes to occur which will mold us from being individuals living in our ego-center world, into a community formed in the image of Christ. This community is not one that can be lived in an isolated, homogenous world — a world where simple black and white, preconceived opinions and prejudices are allowed to exist. Today, more so than ever before, our communities must be representative of, and seen as part of, all of God's creation.

From Talmudic and Biblical teachings, we've learned that we are to undertake to live in a community grounded in God's love, which means that we are to recognize that we are called by God to perform God's work in the world, the whole world. As noted by Gershon Winkler in *Daily Kabbalah*, Jewish mysticism holds that "God loves you. But remember always that God also loves every creation and cherishes every stone, plant, and animal." Said in a similar way by Franciscan Friar Richard Rohr, "To be a person of faith means that you see things — people, animals, plants, the earth — as inherently connected to God, connected to you, and therefore, most worthy of love and dignity."

We pray that we are true to our Christian faith and journey recognizing that we must acknowledge God's presence in everyone. We pray that we recognize that we do not live in a homogeneous nation but rather one that is multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-religious. We pray to overcome our readiness to judge based on a first impression or one that does not meet our expectations but that we wait to see what might await us if we listen and try to understand. We pray to always display our faith through love and works. We pray for a love that draws others to God, that builds bonds of friendship and interest with others. We pray for the spiritual strength to stand-up to hatred, evil, violence, prejudice, or bigotry in whatever form it may take. We pray that as we live our spiritual journey and its encounters with unexpected people and challenges never anticipated, we may do so without fear or anxiety, but in God's love. Amen.

—Gerry Smelt, Grace Episcopal Church

20th DAY OF LENT

March 11, 2021

And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

—Genesis 1:23

We are all probably very familiar with the story in Genesis, the creation of the world in which we live. As we read through the first chapter of this book, you will see that on each of the seven days God had a plan and when the plan was completed the day was over. Each day had a clear purpose and that purpose was fulfilled.

What can we learn or imply from this pattern? What is the message in this process? How are we to implement this in our lives? We can safely assume that God felt he had done all he had to do to make his work complete on each day because he stopped. He was satisfied with what he saw and how things had come together each day, and on Day Seven when he had finished his work, he was satisfied and he rested.

What does this mean for us? At the end of each day are we satisfied with what we have done? Are we able to rest when day seven comes? According to most research, we Americans take less time to rest and/or vacation than any other industrialized country. We are workaholics. What drives us? Are we not satisfied with the jobs we are doing? Do we over pack our days and nights, do we stretch ourselves beyond our capabilities? Do we take on too much? Do we have too many responsibilities? Do we consider why we do some of the things we do? Are we making choices for the right reasons?

As Christians we are to be led to do things that God has planned for us. We are to follow in the steps of Jesus each day of our lives. We are to be as Christlike as possible to be an example to others as disciples of our Lord. And we have the tools we need to do this. God gave us his words and the words of Jesus through the Bible, and we have the most valuable of tools: prayer

God, support us and guide us and lead us to do that which you have planned for us, to complete our purpose each day. In all we do, lead us to emulate Christ, to be loving and forgiving, to be kind, to lend a hand to those in need. So throughout this season of Lent, let us recommit ourselves to live our purpose every day in whatever way we can. Amen.

—Shirley Lowe, Providence United Methodist Church

21st DAY OF LENT

March 12, 2021

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

—Genesis 1:24

Normally, I spend my days in an interior office, under fluorescent lights and immersed in a buzzing world of technology. For the past year, I've been teleworking from my living room, surrounded by windows with two sleeping dogs underfoot.

I've rediscovered wonderment through the flicker of movement outside, distracting me from my computer screen and capturing the attention of the dogs. We've been mesmerized by the snake suspended in the branches of our shrubbery, defying gravity and moving with a grace that belies its shape, and we've been spooked by the sudden movement of a little skink under the steps. We've been intrigued by the box turtle plodding through our yard to eat the mushrooms, and we've been amazed by those industrious squirrels scurrying up and down trees carrying acorns and impossibly large mouthfuls of leaves to build a nest. I've been amused by our dogs' tireless endeavors to scatter our neighbors' chickens that wander into our yard, and I've felt their joy when they eagerly dig, pursuing moles.

With each little movement, I'm reminded that God created these creatures for us. And God saw that it was good.

Lord, thank you for reminding us of the gentleness of your presence, your whimsy and your love through the gifts of all creatures great and small. Under your watchful eye, when our attention is brought to even the least of these, we know that you are with us always. Amen.

—Karen Taminger, St Mark Lutheran Church

22nd DAY OF LENT

March 13, 2021

*And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind,
and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind:
and God saw that it was good.*

—Genesis 1:25

What fun God must have had in making His creation! Genesis 1 is all about you, God. Our God who was thrilled and delighted to put together an immense plan to create a new world and the eventual habitat for His ultimate, perfect creation, man. If you have ever had a project to build an extension or remodelling your home, you will understand how difficult it is to formulate the design, to get everything in the right place at the right time, in the right order and also to get the colours and decorations right, but when its finished, how **good** it feels. God had a million more factors to consider to create this world. His plan was and is still perfect, pure precise and complete — *shalom* in its true sense. He had embarked on a truly fun-filled, delightful adventure in creating an environment for living creatures that He created, that He himself could enjoy. Deciding and imagining how many different species could live harmoniously together, what they would eat, what were the correct conditions for them to live in and thrive, the correct shape and colour to be camouflaged or recognized. Whether they would slither, hop, crawl, fly, walk, swim, jump; whether they would be mammals, insects, reptiles, birds, fish. An enormous plan, wonderful decisions that delighted God as He saw each of them come into being, in perfect harmony and relationship, each with its own perpetual identity. What exquisite delight He had in His creation, and with the anticipation that man would delight and appreciate too, in what his father God had made for him.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Father God, for all the love and beauty you reveal in your glorious creation. We are in awe that we are part of your wonderful design and plan. We are in awe when we notice the intricate design of an insect, the glorious plumage of a bird, magnificent landscapes or to contemplate the complexities of an eye which is part of the body you designed in Your image — all in perfect harmony. How can we not bow down and worship you, our glorious creator God. Our words are so inadequate: holy, perfect, breath-taking, amazing, beautiful, awesome, loving. We bow down and give you honour and praise and thanks. Enable us to understand our responsibilities in preserving and restoring your world to your original plan of order, peace and beauty. We want to be guardians of your beloved world and your creatures in it and to have respect for the humanity you created us to be part of. Give us the eyes to see, and the opportunities to be part of the restoration of your perfect world. Holy Spirit, we ask for our eyes to be opened. Make us good guardians of your beloved creation, Father. May we be the worthy keepers of our Father's wondrous work. Amen.

—Bob and Celia Christmas, Vineyard Church of the Peninsula

4th SUNDAY IN LENT

March 14, 2021

And God said, Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness...

—Genesis 1:26a

Not by accident, but by God's own good pleasure, we share the image and likeness of God.

In the renaissance confessions of my Christian tradition, we teach “original righteousness was intended to include not only a balanced physical condition, but these gifts as well: a more certain knowledge of God, respect of God, and confidence in God. Or at least the uprightness and power needed to do these things. And Scripture confirms this when it says that humankind was formed in the image and likeness of God. What else does this mean except that a wisdom and righteousness that would grasp God and reflect God was implanted in humankind, that is, humankind received gifts like the knowledge of God, respect of God, trust in God, and the like? ... [O]riginal righteousness is the very likeness of God, which was implanted in the human creature by God” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II).

Therefore, by God's good pleasure, humankind was made with God's original right-ness. And if that doesn't call me to Lenten reflection and repentance, what will? — because, as I consider my relationships with heaven and earth, with God and with you, I am convicted by a true judgement that, though light has come into my formless void, I have loved to cast my chaotic shadows rather than God's righteousness. I act the fool more often than I enact the faith, the respect, the knowledge, or the confidence of God that my God intends for me.

But who I am in God's image (and, if you are my similarly shadow-casting sibling, who *you* are in God's image) is not erased by the outward life that defaces right relationships between God and humanity and all of creation. Whom we were first imaged to be by God, whom God still imagines us to be through the gracious call and ministry of Christ, resides in the face of righteousness we see in Jesus Christ on the face of this body in his likeness.

Christ Jesus, Creator Word, you are the perfect image of God's very being, the immaculate icon of holiest holiness, revealed in the right relationship you extend to all that is in every arrangement of atoms and ideas. Restart and reform and recall and repent my life in you, by you, for you, and through you; let others see the best of me as your image alone. Amen.

—the Rev Joel Neubauer (editor), St Mark Lutheran Church

23rd DAY OF LENT

March 15, 2021

*... and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,
and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth,
and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

—Genesis 1:26b

We human beings, created a little lower than the angels, have authority over the expanse of salt water that covers most of the earth's surface and surrounds its land masses, and all that lives in it; the air, an invisible gaseous substance surrounding us, a mixture of oxygen and nitrogen necessary for breathing; domesticated animals that are tame, kept as pets or on a farm; wild animals that live or grow in the natural environment; creeping things that move slowly and carefully in order to avoid being heard or noticed.

We are God's representative. The basic purpose for which He created humankind is to be responsible to God, expected to manage and develop and care for creation. As we exercise dominion over the created world, we mirror God. Our work is meant to serve God's purpose more than our own, which prevents us from domineering over all that God has put under our control. Dominion is not the same as tyranny: it is to protect, not to abuse for our own ends. We humans are in charge of the world on behalf of God, responsible to care for nature in a way that is consistent with God's will.

My yard is connected to a patch of wetlands with a small stream. I have taken it upon myself to clean out the rubbish, car tires, and construction material (bringing it to metal and tire recycling agencies). I have noticed that the wildlife has begun returning; deer, squirrels, birds, butterflies, amphibious creatures, and predator animals — raccoons, possums, snakes, bald eagles, and owls. What a rewarding endeavor. Nature is flourishing in my backyard and I have a great hobby. I enjoy seeing the creatures that are willing to come to my little corner of the world, to eat, to bathe, to find safety and respite in the trees. I observe how wondrously they are made, their shape, size, color and what they eat. I have looked in books, and on the internet to identify them all: next, I will purchase a pair of night-vision binoculars to observe the night creatures in the woods while I sit outside on warm summer nights.

I am amazed, my God, by your imagination to create so many species. I am humbled and by your choice of me, one of your creations, to represent your stewardship of earth. Thank you for the honor of this privilege to serve your purpose. Amen.

—Stephenie Gregg, St Mark Lutheran Church

24th DAY OF LENT

March 16, 2021

***So God created humanity in his own image,
in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.***

—Genesis 1:27

What does it mean to you to be made in God's image?

When I was a child, I always thought it may mean that God has red hair like me, or blue eyes, or maybe that God is left-handed. Now however, I think about the characteristics God would want me to have. I think about showing love, generosity, courage, strength, compassion, and forgiveness. I think about one of my favorite hymns — “They will know we are Christians by our Love” — and how that love is the image of God I want to be seen and known by. God knows our hearts and God knows if our hearts are in accordance with His will or not. This is the image of God to strive for, this is the image of God we were created in.

Gracious God, thank you for the joy this day has for me and the many blessings you have given me. Thank you for making me in your image and entrusting me with your mission to care for and love others as you would love them. Help me on days those days that I struggle to be within your image, guide my heart back to you. Please, give me your words, strength and the ability to show your love to those around me when I need it. In your son's precious name, I pray, amen.

—Sarah Vance, St Luke's United Methodist Church

25th DAY OF LENT

March 17, 2021

And God blessed them (the people) ...

—Genesis 1:28a

How many times do parents of little ones repeat, “What do you say?” in attempts to elicit the magic words, *please* and *thank you*? Countless other efforts as well are put forth in training children to be polite, to be respectful, to be honoring (to not be poisonous, as one British mum put it). Christian parents passionately desire, and tirelessly work, that their offspring develop an attitude toward God which is all those things; that worship and praise fill their little hearts and souls; that the name of Jesus be at home on their lips; that they absorb a habit of prayer and Scripture reading; that being surrounded by the family of God, the Church, be for them a lovely, warm and welcoming thought; that their lives be sweetly molded by followers of Jesus faithfully demonstrating discipleship, blessing God in speech, attitude and lifestyle; that they would, in being blessed, be a blessing.

The three short words of today’s verse have me transfixed: “*God blessed them.*” Stop the presses! What? Here is the Eternal Creator of the entire universe expressing loving adoration, kneeling in all the beaming glee of the Artist beholding his completed handiwork, praising the perfection, the radiance, the accuracy of the Likeness, imparting his heart’s highest desire on the fruit of his labors! We know a father’s blessing was a bequest once-for-all, irreversible, non-repeating (Genesis 27). And here, in the early days of creation, our Heavenly Bridegroom utters anointing words over all mankind for all time, words whose anointing continues flowing, bathing us, in 2021! Do you feel, with me, the need to kneel at the staggering enormity of this truth, that if he blesses us, what debt of love must we owe him?

Our Father, that I go about every day of my life awash in your royal esteem, kept ever present before you through the advocacy of your Son, guided and protected and taught by your Spirit, moves me to silence, to tears, undone, sweetly broken. You’ve blessed me! You’ve chosen me! And you love me! “So may the words of my mouth, my meditation-thoughts, and every movement of my heart be always pure and pleasing, acceptable before your eyes, my only Redeemer, my Protector-God” (Psalm 19:14). Amen.

—Pastor Don Freeman, Vineyard Church of the Peninsula

26th DAY OF LENT

March 18, 2021

*and God said unto them,
Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it:
and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every
living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

—Genesis 1:28b

When we read or hear this verse from Genesis, we often conclude that the fruitful and multiply wording deals only with growing a family. In simple terms, we believe we are instructed to have children. While that may be a part of it, when we apply the rest of the words to that phrase, we should recognize it means much more.

God has given us many gifts, and some of those gifts are very different from other people. When we use these gifts as God intends, then we will begin to see fruit from our work. The more that we utilize our gifts, the more productive each gift becomes toward God's Kingdom. As we build confidence in the use of our gifts, we will often learn of other gifts we have that we did not previously recognize. Our gifts are multiplying within ourselves and our gifts are multiplying by the number of people and creatures that we are sharing with around us.

When we fully live into the gifts from God then our “dominion” or care for creation will be better utilized and be more productive. In this Lenten season, let us praise God for the gifts we have been given and rededicate the use of those gifts for the work of the Kingdom, here and now.

Dear Lord, help us focus on your will for our lives. Give us the strength to respond to your call and the encouragement to support. Amen.

—the Rev David Magruder, Zion United Methodist Church

27th DAY OF LENT

March 19, 2021

***And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed,
which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree,
in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed;
to you it shall be for meat.***

—Genesis 1:29

One of the traditional ways Lent has been observed by the Christian community is by fasting. Depending on the tradition, the fast is sometimes to abstain from eating meat. We discover in this passage that before the fall, the food God intends for us is from the grains, vegetables and fruits He provided. In some ways a fast from eating meat might be a “back to basics” fast. It is a practice that connects us to the way we were created. By mindful abstinence from things we may have taken for granted, we appreciate the abundance of God’s many gifts.

It is a worthwhile exercise to think of the way God created us and reconnect to that source of life and hope. We do well to remind ourselves of the ways God has provided for us and be grateful for His many gifts. Is it necessary to be vegetarians because of what we read in Genesis 1:29?

Saint Paul tells us in chapter fourteen of the Letter to the Romans that “Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat.” In other words, it is okay to eat pork chops, but not if it causes another person to sin or stumble. This holds the challenge for us as Christians. How do we know?

The task for us is to be mindful of our brothers and sisters. There is a tendency today to think of our rights and forget the context. As Christians we are committed to living in community, and that means that things are not just about us and what we can do. It is about the practices that build up the Body of Christ and support those who need our help.

We thank you, Lord, for the abundance of creation and the many ways you provide for us. Give us hearts for our brothers and sisters. Help us to build up your Body by the ways we live and give us the grace to be better disciples. We ask all this in faith and with hope in salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

—the Rev Thomas E Haynes, Christ the King Episcopal Church

28th DAY OF LENT

March 20, 2021

*And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air,
and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life,
I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.*

—Genesis 1:30

The other day my daughter and I stopped for milkshakes. Though the same flavors, mine did not taste particularly good and I decided not to drink it. From the back seat I heard my eight-year-old's sweet voice, "You can have the rest of mine." It was an offer to share out of her "abundance," even if just a better tasting treat. Since I could live without my milkshake, I let her enjoy. But I gave thanks for seeing the generosity in her heart.

God is generous. Throughout our creation story we see that God is the Provider of All Things. We are reminded today that God has provided every "green thing" needed in addition to provisions of air, water, earth, sunshine, and living things that make life thrive. We are called to care for it all, including one another. God has provided enough for all of creation. However, so many still go without because we have not learned well enough yet to say, "you can have the rest of mine." I invite you to spend some time today naming the areas of abundance you have and asking God how you might be called to share. For some this might even be an invitation to consider a more simple way of living. One of my most favorite sayings comes from Mother Teresa: "Live simply, so that others might simply live."

God of all things, Provider of all things, thank you for ensuring I have what I need despite my wants. Help me to see the blessings you give each day by providing for my needs so that I might in turn share from those gifts for those who have less. For you have given creation enough, it is us who have yet to learn to share and spread it. Amen.

—the Rev Lisa Berbery, Crooks Memorial United Methodist Church

5th SUNDAY IN LENT

March 21, 2021

***And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.
And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.***

—Genesis 1:31

I am not a handyman. It mostly does not bode well when I have a tool in my hand, but should I soldier on and attempt a given DIY project, I might earn an “e” for effort, however ill-advised my persistence — but the completion (now become repair) will take a qualified craftsperson more time and effort and at greater cost. I am comforted that I am not alone in my peculiarity. I noticed recently a company’s van with the slogan, “We repair what your hubby fixed.” With the passage of years, and a catalogue of misadventures, I am much less reluctant to call in the pros. I do so admire expertise, perfect finishing touches, things that operate smoothly and dovetail without creative use of jiggling, forcing, or duct tape.

Today’s verse shines light on Another, the Alpha Craftsman, the Divine Creator, the world’s Author, our Father. As Yahweh stands to take in His handiwork of the past six days, I can hear His bubbling laughter, His joy song, His sigh in sated, work-weary contentment, thrilling with the purest of pleasures. All about Him, His nascent world pulsates with life, with color, with diversity, with balance and order. Then, His Sixth Day creation meanders into view and He is elated anew at the exquisite perfection of this man, this woman; radiant, lovely, flawless in their innocent nakedness; His majestic likeness now crowning the totality of His love-labors, His glory now enlarging from within the created order, His sublime Being now replicated in time and space, in all of creation.

Dearest Lord Jesus, knowing that the tongues of men and of angels are muted before You, I, likewise, am hushed to silence, facedown in Your presence. Your shimmering glory evaporates my woolgathering, obliterates my banalities, and stirs me to worship, pouring myself out as a fragrant offering over your feet. I feel the psalmist’s striving to adequately wordsmith Your creation when he cries, “The heavens declare...” while conceding, with the hymnwriter, that this, too, is “a present far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” Amen.

—Pastor Don Freeman, Vineyard Church of the Peninsula

29th DAY OF LENT

March 22, 2021

***Thus the heavens and the earth were finished,
and all the host of them.***

—Genesis 2:1

And when it was finished, God rested. God did not need rest. He rested because His work was done, to give man a structure of time. God blessed and sanctified the seventh day as a gift to man for rest. Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27). The Mosaic law set the Sabbath aside for a day of worship (Exodus 20:8).

No bush was in the earth and no one worked the ground. God caused it to rain and He formed a man from the earth. Genesis 2:8 tells us God created the Garden in Eden and gave man to work and take care of it. God shows us we are to work and to be fruitful. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God commanded Adam, “You are to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die.” We, like Adam, are given free will to choose right from wrong and to follow Jesus. God took a rib from Adam to create woman. Adam said, “... bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.” Our lesson here is man and woman are created to become one in body and spirit and to deliberately love God and each other. Chapter 2 ends, “Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” They felt no shame because they were without sin. Recall God’s admonishment to Adam. Like Adam, we have to choose between right and wrong every day.

Good and gracious Father, You are the holy and majestic Creator! By Your word You formed the heavens and earth and all the hosts therein. I praise You for the glory of the heaven and the beauty of the earth, and thank You that You made man in Your own image and likeness, to have dominion over all that You have made. Thank You Father. Despite the fall of man and our sinful nature, You redeemed me through your love and grace. I pray You will return me to fellowship with You through the shed blood of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank You that Jesus has been appointed to judge the world in righteousness. Thank You that He is the perfect Man who will rule the earth in righteousness. I praise and thank You for Your word and the truths that it contains. Help me to study your word and to listen to what the Spirit would tell me. Keep me from falling. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

—Cleo Mackey, Providence United Methodist Church

30th DAY OF LENT

March 23, 2021

***And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made;
and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.***

—Genesis 2:2

In our times of dividedness, anger and mistrust, a Talmudic example reflecting God's peace can be found in Rabbi Joseph Telushkin's *The Book of Jewish Values: A Day-by-Day Guide to Ethical Living*, in a story from the Babylonian Talmud's teaching of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai that no person ever greeted him first. Greeting people you pass, particularly on a regular basis, with a warm "Hello" or "Good morning" establishes a human connection between those who otherwise might have no link at all. Yaffa Eliach's remarkable *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* tells the story of a Hasidic rabbi who lived in Danzig in the 1930s. Each morning he used to take a stroll; taking care to fulfill Rabbi Yochanan's dictum, he would greet every man, woman, and child "with a warm smile and a cordial 'Good morning.'" Over the years, the rabbi became acquainted with many of his fellow townspeople...and would always greet them by their proper title and name." In the fields near the town, there was a farmer whom he used to pass. "Good morning, Herr Muller," he would greet him. "Good morning, Herr Rabbiner," the man would respond. When World War II erupted, the rabbi's walks stopped, while Herr Muller left his fields and joined the SS. After losing his family at the Treblinka death camp, the rabbi himself was deported to Auschwitz. One day a selection occurred during which all the Jewish inmates had to pass in front of a Nazi officer, who signaled some people to go the left, to the gas chambers, and others to the right, to a life of slave labor. By this time the rabbi, who had long suffered from starvation and disease, already looked like a "walking skeleton." As the line moved forward, the voice directing people to the right and to the left started to sound familiar. Soon the rabbi could see the face of the man who was sending people to life or death. As he stood in front of the officer, he heard himself saying, "Good morning, Herr Muller." "Good morning, Herr Rabbiner" the man responded. "What are you doing here?" Saying nothing, the rabbi smiled faintly; seconds later, Herr Muller lifted his baton and signaled the rabbi to go to the right, to life. A day later, he was transferred to a safer camp, and survived the war. The rabbi, Yaffa Eliach reports, "now in his eighties, told me in his gentle voice, 'This is the power of a good-morning greeting. A man must always greet his fellow man.'"

Everything is organically, seamlessly joined to everything else. We have all been players in a divine scheme, neither marionettes nor zombies but waves in an ocean, dancers in a ballet, colors on a canvas, words in a story. Discrete and probably autonomous, but never entirely independent. Of course, it is preposterous. Of course, it makes no rational sense. But for just a moment, it is as if we encounter our destiny. Everything is within God.

—Gerry Smelt, Grace Episcopal Church
prayer from Rabbi Lawrence Kushner (*Restful Reflections*, Rabbis Kerry M. Olitzky and Lori Forman)

31st DAY OF LENT

March 24, 2021

***And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it:
because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.***

—Genesis 2:3

God blessed the seventh day and rested.

On the Sabbath we worship our Father and glorify His name. For Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27), so that we could rest from our daily labor, stress, and worries. But after the Sabbath, it seems like all our responsibilities and worrying return.

Unlike us, God did not continue to create after the seventh day, for everything was good. In this sense, God has been resting eternally; however, He is now seeking to redeem us. The only way we can find this eternal rest is in Him, through Jesus Christ. He offered the greatest “rest” the world would ever know, but it was not a physical rest. Jesus brought the offer of this “rest” of freedom from sin and death — for people of all nations — and life in the eternal kingdom of God.

But life does not stop on the Sabbath, so doing work can seem justifiable. If the feeling of needing to work is present, I feel as though we have not fully trusted in God. Do we not believe that we will be provided for on the other six days? God created a need for the Sabbath within us at creation. We were designed to rest. When we honor the Sabbath, we declare our faith in God. The Sabbath is a beautiful gift we should accept gratefully. A chance to rest. An opportunity to trust. An invitation to experience His faithfulness.

Heavenly Father, thank you that Jesus may be my Sabbath rest and that in Him I have peace with You. Thank you that I am redeemed through Christ and that eternal rest is promised for all who have trusted in Him for salvation. I pray that many will come to an understanding that faith in Christ's death and glorious resurrection has secured them eternal rest. Thank you for the precious gift of the Sabbath you have given us. Show me areas in my life where I have not fully submitted to You and help me to learn how to accept your gift of rest. As we rest, Lord, I pray that you revitalize our bodies to go out into the week so that we may serve you. Continue to grow our faith in You and help us to find eternal rest in You, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.

—Adam Leschinger, St Mark Lutheran Church

32nd DAY OF LENT

March 25, 2021

***These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created,
in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens...***

—Genesis 2:4

We have heard this story many times in our lives, that out of nothing God created the heavens and the earth. We are blessed to have a loving God who created a wonderful earth for us.

I don't know about you, but I truly love the majesty of nature. I often feel closest to God when I'm in nature. I'm often overwhelmed by the majesty of God when I look at the beauty of the mountains or the power of the ocean. I feel like a tiny speck in an amazing creation. But I'm reminded just as God created those beautiful and amazing mountains and oceans, God also created me. I am as thought out and as wonderfully made as a mountain or the ocean. And not only did God create the earth, the heavens, and us...God created it all out of nothing.

Lent is a time when we focus on our own mortality. We were made from dust and to dust we will return. God creates amazing creations out of nothing. So, when we are tempted to feel overwhelmed by everything going on in our lives and the world, remember God can create the heavens, the earth, and us out of nothing. God can work with us, through us, and in spite of us even when we feel we have nothing to give. I encourage you during this Lenten season, to take time in prayer to listen for God speaking and moving in your life.

Dear God, we appreciate your amazing and wonderful creation, we appreciate that you made something wonderful out of nothing. Help us to open to your work in our lives this Lenten season. Amen.

—Megan Collins, St Luke's United Methodist Church

33rd DAY OF LENT

March 26, 2021

***And every plant of the field before it was in the earth,
and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain
upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.***

—Genesis 2:5

Reading these verses, I imagine our Creator Artist God looking upon the blank earth canvas with a vision of the beautiful, luxurious garden He was planning to create for His children to inhabit. It would be filled with all manner of colorful, appealing varieties of plants, cute animals to cuddle, lovely mountains and crystal-clear waterfalls. I imagine the pride and joy He felt as He planned, perfecting every detail to receive His children. There must have been great excitement, hope, joy, even with the knowledge that His beloved kids would eventually break His heart, doomed to suffer in a now-and-not-yet state of waiting for the redemption and return of the King!

Recently, while reading the book *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta"* I came across the letter where she mentions Jesus' words, "I thirst." She explains that Jesus showed her that He was not talking about a physical thirst, but a thirst for intimacy with His people, a thirst for the lost. She encourages her Catholic sisters to put their name there, "I thirst for _____," saying that we, the church, satiate His thirst when we bring the gospel to the nations. As I reflected on her words, I understood that Jesus' thirst was a deep longing to save the lost world, satiated by us "watering" the broken and lost of the earth with the living word of His love, rescuing them into His Kingdom. Much like the Father looking at the earth canvas in Genesis, perhaps Jesus looked with joy at the "new beginnings" bloodstained canvas, knowing that it now could once again be painted with the glorious redemption and restoration of His beloved prodigals, His chosen ones, even me. What a love!

Father, help us to take our eyes off of the bewildering circumstances closing in all around us, which cause us so much anxiety and pain. Help us to see this time in history as a new canvas that you have given to us as your laborers in this great earth garden, that we might give you a cup of cold water to drink by bringing the great gospel message of hope to the lost. Give us a new vision and new energy to serve you with gratitude and joy. Remind us that when we love the broken, the hurting, the unloveables — who are all objects of your passionate love — we are quenching your deep thirst. Help us to water and cultivate the garden that you have made ready, the Genesis 2 Garden that was ultimately broken, but restored by your precious sacrifice. Jesus, we love you and praise you. Amen!

—Amelia Avila, Vineyard Church of the Peninsula

34th DAY OF LENT

March 27, 2021

***But there went up a mist from the earth,
and watered the whole face of the ground.***

—Genesis 2:6

As soon as we would think that God was done and ready to rest, we read that God made the creation in such a way that it would be self-sustaining. The mist or water from the earth allows the moisture to build in the sky so that rain is produced. In this narrative, we recognize once again the loving details that God puts into everything.

This is something that occurs right before God creates *adam*, which is the Hebrew word for humanity. The water or mist can cover the ground to assure that plants and crops grow. The water covers the ground so that lakes can be replenished. The water covers the ground so that humans and other creatures can survive.

It is when the rains stop and the dirt becomes dry and parched that it turns to dust. The ground needs the moisture, just as we need the grace of God, which was fully revealed in Christ. But in the season of Lent, a season that is marked with ashes or dirt to humbly remind us from how it all began, let us take to heart the love and grace of God, and seek to grow in loving service.

Let us remember the Creation narrative and reflect on the fullness that is revealed. Let us humbly walk in this journey to the cross, seeking to grow as the faithful disciples Jesus calls us to be. Let us be fed with the water of life, Jesus Christ, in order to go into the world in service to others.

Almighty God, look with mercy on your family for whom our Lord Jesus Christ willingly died for and give us courage to walk in the way of his suffering, and to share in his resurrection. Amen.

—the Rev David Magruder, Zion United Methodist Church

PALM AND PASSION SUNDAY

March 28, 2021

***And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground,
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.***

—Genesis 2:7

aphar min ha-adamah

God formed us from “the dust of the ground.” Previously in Genesis 2:6, God took water and prepared the ground to create the perfect consistency for molding, like using wet sand for optimal sandcastle construction. It makes sense that God used life-sustaining water to create us, since our bodies are sixty percent water.

Why dust though? What’s so special about *aphar*: the dirt, dust, clay, and soil that covers the earth? Dust is dirty. Dust triggers allergies and exposes signs of neglect and passing time. Dust is dead skin cells. Dust is trampled underfoot and smothered by palm leaves and cloaks. Our modern society invests billions of dollars in products that make our homes and our lives cleaner and dust-free. Yet, the LORD God chooses to take that same dirt sitting on our living room coffee tables to form us and mold us into something special. This is the same dust that provides nutrients for plant matter to grow, and the same dust that forms nebulae within distant galaxies in space. Dust is a building block of Creation, and it shapes us into who we are. We are physically connected to Creation through dust.

So the next time you pick up a duster to do some spring cleaning, remember that the Lord formed that other forty percent of you from the simplest of beginnings to create someone who is complexly, unequivocally, fearfully, and wonderfully made. You were born from dust and water and raised to new life.

LORD God, you are the Maker of all that is known and unknown, seen and unseen. You formed each of us from the simplest of beginnings, the mere dust of Creation. You breathed life into our nostrils, and molded us all in special, complex ways. Help us to embrace the diversity of others and the uniqueness we carry within ourselves. Amen.

Always remember that the LORD God loves you, *aphar* and all.

—Andy Taming, St Mark Lutheran Church

MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

March 29, 2021

***And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone;
I will make him an help meet for him.***

—Genesis 2:18

I heard a powerful sermon on this text once, and the preacher talked about the loneliness of Adam. I think we all can relate in some ways. We feel incomplete and want a partner for the journey.

We think of course of marriage and romantic partners when we read this, but God provides many people on our lives who help us and walk with us. Not everyone is called to marriage. People lose marriage partners and find themselves widows. We still long for a helper as we make our pilgrimage as Christians. We don't want to do it alone.

God provides helpers for us. I will observe that he does it sometimes while we sleep and have no awareness of what is going on. We have to be open to God's providence, and this is often the challenge for us. We have an idea of what we expect God to do. Perhaps we have prayed for help in some specific way. God's plan is not always mine, and that is a good thing.

Part of the problem is getting over ourselves and our own will and being open to the helpers our Lord provides. In the Rule of Saint Benedict, we read about the way we are to receive an unexpected visitor in chapter sixty-six. On hearing the knock, the porter is to exclaim "Thanks be to God." Benedict knew that the visitor could either be an opportunity for ministry or the helper we need. In either case God is providing, and we should be grateful.

We have to get over ourselves and have confidence that God will give us what (and whom!) we need. We have to be gracious as we accept his gifts. We don't want to reject that helper just because he or she is not what we asked for.

Father in Heaven, we are mindful of your many gifts and ask you to open our hearts to your will for us. We know you understand it is not good for us to be alone, and we thank you for the many helpers you have provided us over the years. We ask you to give us wisdom and discerning hearts as we live and work as your disciples. Amen.

—the Rev Thomas E Haynes, Christ the King Episcopal Church

TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

March 30, 2021

***And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them:
and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.***

—Genesis 2:19

One thing about this passage that has always amazed me was the amount of faith that God put in Adam to name the animals of His creation. Having several animals in our family, I can tell you that when a new pet comes into the Higgins household, the person to whom that pet has been gifted is the one who gets to name the pet.

However, our most recent pet was an indoor rabbit that my wife Carolyn got for me early to celebrate my birthday this year, which falls in April. When the new bunny was brought home, I was sick with the stomach flu, and that evening I was introduced to my new bunny and was told by my daughters that her name is Ginger. I must admit, I felt a bit sad, because I was looking forward to naming the bunny myself, but my daughters were so pleased with themselves and their sweet name, that I just shrugged my shoulders and accepted it.

I see the faith that God placed in Adam in naming the animals as a beautiful act of trust and honor. In this way, God was affirming the relationship He wanted to have with Adam and Eve, by trusting Adam with such a personal act of naming the animals. It also shows us a lot about the character of God, in that He was so pleased with His “ultimate” creation (man and woman) that He entrusted them to care for the animals, the garden, and the world. Thanks be to God, for as His children today, we are still called to care for all that God has gifted us in His creation, as sons and daughters of Adam. I for one, am glad that God continues to entrust us with this task.

Lord God, thank you for the trust and honor that you continue to give to us, your children, as stewards of your Creation. Help us to see You in the creative splendor around us and remind us of your faithfulness and love that you provide to us daily. We honor you, and worship you, Almighty God, there is none like You!

—Phillip Higgins, Music Director and Organist, Crooks Memorial United Methodist Church

WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

March 31, 2021

***And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air,
and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.***

—Genesis 2:20

What fun, being the one to name all the creatures of the fields and skies! The only time we ourselves are able to name new life around us is most likely with pets and newborn children. Naming is indeed also an awesome responsibility. What if we just don't get it right? Once something is named, it most likely will stick! So we consider characteristics, perhaps refer to past family names; we certainly consult family members and perhaps our closest friends. Naming is too important to do it alone!

Imagine being tasked with giving every single cattle, beast and bird its original name! For Adam, naming all the creatures around him was certainly thought-provoking. After all, he had no precedence to use for inspiration, no words from the past, no books to consult, and certainly no Google or Sirius! Adam did not even have anyone to help him: no family, no spouse, no team to work with. It was all a blank and empty slate.

God saw right away all that life's tasks are better shared with a helper. And so, before long, God provided a partner to help Adam.

The message for us is clear: we need helpers in our lives. God understood this; likewise, He knows our own needs before we ourselves even realize them. We can live in assurance that God as our eternal helper answers all our temporal needs. God provides. For this, we thank God without ceasing. For our life's helpers, we also thank without ceasing.

Thank you, God, for blessing us with your own presence in our lives. Thank for you for all the helpers in our lives. Please help us to show appreciation and patience to all those who help us tackle our tasks lying ahead of us. Thank you, dear Father, for providing for our needs, both simple and complex. Amen.

—Christy Lumm, St Mark Lutheran Church

MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 1, 2021

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.

—Genesis 2:21

Have you ever woken up from a sound, deep sleep with a sense of unusual clarity about what to do, whom to see and where to go? Not just your usual mental agenda kicking in as you stir, but an excited sense of revelation and a call to action? The chances are, you have received a divine download. While your defenses were subdued as you slumbered, and there was no room for argument, God was planting his thoughts or drawing out of you something special.

For Abram, it was the impossible dream of a future nation that he would father; for Ananias, it was the intimidating challenge to visit Saul of Tarsus and relay the commission for him to become a missionary to the Gentiles; for Paul, it was the insistent call from the man of Macedonia to take the gospel to Greece. In each case, God ordained a deep sleep in order to initiate the next stage of his plan and it was no different for Adam, right back in the beginning. Having caused a deep sleep to fall on him, God created a companion from his side, flesh of his flesh, to work side by side in the garden of Eden. Without their partnership, there would be no people of Israel, no Gentile nations and therefore no Greece. Do we expect our Father to implant his desires and designs as we sleep? As we wake, do we heed these promptings? As we consider the implications, do we shrink back in fear? Imagine Adam's delight to find Eve, made of the same stuff! He was no longer alone, no longer celibate, no longer incomplete. Maybe that is the kind of joy we will experience as we cooperate in God's plans. Sleep well!

Father God, what a wonderful miracle it was to provide a companion for Adam. To create both man and woman made in your image. Did You really first anaesthetize him, then perform keyhole surgery, remove a vital part close to his heart, transform this into a living being, heal the wound instantaneously and then open their eyes to the beauty of each other? Whether you did this literally or symbolically, I'm in deep awe at your compassion, tenderness and skill in creating us as we are, male and female, perfect complementarity. Dear God, please continue to use me to work out your purposes on earth. Speak to me tonight in the watches of the night. Deep calling unto deep. And when I wake help me sift the God-dreams from all the others. Grant me clarity to see what you are saying and the courage to follow through on your instructions, to enthusiastically embrace (like Adam surely did!) what you are creating tomorrow. Amen.

—Christopher Mabey, Vineyard Church of the Peninsula

GOOD FRIDAY

April 2, 2021

***And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman,
and brought her unto the man.***

—Genesis 2:22

I keep my love and spirit in a cage: my fearsome and fragile heart, my inspiring till expiring lungs, in a self-grown cage of ribs. My flesh and fat round out a profile that protects and often hides the secret lines of organ cantatas of life and love that only God knows as my deepest, truest self. “Create in me a clean and open heart, O God; renew and reveal a right spirit within me.” Whom would you meet if you could access my inmost truth, if you could peek behind my ribs, if you could meet the personhood I view as in a dim-lit mirror?

When the earthling was alone upon God’s good earth, when the ancient human was without a helper from this humus of creation, when our first parent was without peer upon this planet, God did not look into the mud for an ultimate masterpiece, but behind our own ribs. Life is made for us and life is mined from us: all this work is God’s, full of grace and truth.

In the treasure chest of Christ — in the holiness of God’s human heart and heaving lungs — lay the expansive love that reigns under the mysterious name, “the kingdom of God.” Though Christ Jesus speaks early words of hidden good news, that “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above,” our Lord faithfully promises that he, when “lifted up from the earth, will draw all people” to himself as — from above our waiting, watching pilgrim senses — on the cross “one of Caesar’s soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out” and a new creation was born through the caesarian section of the kingdom of God for us from our Safekeeper’s opened abdomen. From that broken water, from those bloody birthpangs, from that wounded ribcage (soon also to be healed by God), we see God our image-giver clearly, face to face, our truest life.

Holy Jesus, in my heart today are nervous pains and anxious aches I cannot comprehend; in my lungs today, my breath is shallow as I find room to pray “Hallowed be thy name” as under the name of Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, I recall how often I choose to say “Crucify him.” There is an aloneness that haunts me as I behold your cross and the ongoing attack I lob at you in lovelessness to my neighbors (in whom you are, my God). O Jesus, look into these deepest truths of me and create someone new, draw out someone renewed, show me a humanity I have forgotten and hidden in myself that by your opening can be for me a holy helper as you give me life, My Holiest Helper. Creator Christ, open my cage and free me for life with all whom you deliver by your open love and Spirit. Amen.

—the Rev Joel Neubauer (editor), St Mark Lutheran Church

HOLY SATURDAY

April 3, 2021

***And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh:
she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
(Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother,
and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.)***

—Genesis 2:23(-24)

On this Holy Saturday, also known as Great Saturday or Saturday of Mourning, we are caught between the heavy sadness of the death of Jesus on the cross and the anticipation of His resurrection on Easter. Today we experience that feeling of wanting more, yet knowing we must experience the sadness and pain, if we are to fully embrace the joys of Easter.

The past year has brought much sadness and pain into our lives. The pandemic has created a climate in which there has been so much uncertainty. Jobs have been lost, businesses have closed, families and friends have been sick and died. We have grieved that so much has been lost; celebrations, graduations, weddings, treasured time with family and friends. This entire year has been one of waiting and anticipation. Waiting for Covid to end, waiting for the vaccine, waiting for the election results, waiting to see friends and family, waiting to worship as a church family and so much more. We are learning to become people of patience and perseverance. Most importantly, we have learned of the connectedness we share as a community, a nation and, more importantly, a world. When a virus can jump countries, continents and oceans within days, our connection seems even more profound. When the actions we take, or do not take, affect people close to us, but also those afar, we realize the interconnectedness of our lives and our humanity.

God has created us all in His image to share this planet Earth together, breathing her air, tending her land and serving His people. As we await the resurrection of our Savior, let us take a moment to feel those connections that God so long ago created between the first man and woman. They are still here today, present between all of us as children of God.

“On the day when the weight deadens on your shoulders and you stumble, may the clay dance to balance you. And when your eyes freeze behind the grey window and the ghost of loss gets in to you, may a flock of colours, indigo, red, green, and azure blue come to awaken in you a meadow of delight. When the canvas frays in the currach of thought and a stain of ocean blackens beneath you, may there come across the waters a path of yellow moonlight to bring you safely home. May the nourishment of the earth be yours, may the clarity of light be yours, may the fluency of the ocean be yours, may the protection of the ancestors be yours. And so may a slow wind work these words of love around you, an invisible cloak to mind your life.” Amen.

—Elizabeth O’Brien, Grace Episcopal Church
prayer quotes “Beannacht” by John O’Donohue

EASTER SUNDAY: RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

April 4, 2021

*And they were both naked, the man and his wife,
and were not ashamed.*

—Genesis 2:25

I must confess that this text has often left me in a state of bemusement. All of us have seen painted renditions of what we might imagine that scene may have looked like. Fig leaves and other flora included, of course, for modesty's sake. Marketing has mined the scene for commercial purposes and avoids prurient associations (you get the picture).

I also confess a sense of befuddlement. This, as you know, concludes the depiction of the Creation. Birds, bees, flowers and trees. Shangri La. Paradise. Finally, man and woman. But what do they convey that is useful as we celebrate the signal event of the Christian faith?

To me, two things (three would be a sermon instead of a devotion). First, it describes the pristine state of the relationship between human beings that we believe is God's divine intention. No secrets, no jealousies, no confusions. Everything is as it presents, and everything is as it should be. This is the charge to us in growing in our common discipleship. And that is because...

Second, it describes the redeemed and reconciled relationship we should have with God. It is a relationship of love, obedience and freedom. That freedom, disfigured in disobedience is now restored through the singular act of love played out in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we are now free to choose it: to once again be naked, and not ashamed.

Dear Lord, we thank you for the gift of Christ, and the ability to receive the gift of redeemed and reconciled relationships with you and each other. Keep the memory of this precious gift ever present to us as Easter fades in our collective consciousness, that your intention for creation might flourish in the here and now. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—the Rev Clarence Brown, St Luke's United Methodist Church