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**Greendale Ecumenical Group  
2021 Lenten Devotional  
Vol. 2**



**Monday, March 1, 2021**

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Scripture: Hebrews 1:8-12 from The Message

8 But God said about his Son, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter in your kingdom is a scepter for justice.

9 You have loved what is right and hated what is wrong. That is why God, your God, anointed you, rather than your companions, with the oil of joy.”

10 God also said, “Lord, in the beginning you laid the foundation of the earth. With your own hands you made the heavens.

11 They will come to an end, but you will live forever. They will all wear out like clothes.

12 They will be taken off like a coat. You will change them like clothes. But you remain the same, and your life will never end.

**M**any people these days are focused upon genealogy research, stirred up by the many ads on television, submitting mouth swabs of DNA so the firm they engage can match them to not only their forbears country of origin, but possibly “lost” family members. One of the shows I watched on this indicated many people get more than they bargained for; knowledge of people in their family tree they may not have wanted to find out about ...

The reality of our DNA has been studied in depth by many groups of researchers, confirming each other, for how every one of us can trace our lineage back to a single mother; it doesn't matter what race you think you're a part of, or culture you are steeped in; all of humanity derived from the same place and then spread out over the face of the planet.

Sounds like Adam and Eve, right?

Here in the Hebrews text, it is laid out how God has made known that Jesus' roots go back further in the work of Eternity than the ministry he was born into through Palestine for the scant three years he preached, healed and taught. We are told Jesus, known as Wisdom in ancient times, was intricately part of earth's and the heaven's genesis.

This means Jesus was involved in creation of humanity's DNA. This in turn links the penchant for justice, doing right and denouncing wrong, otherwise known as the Essence of Grace and Mercy that are our God, is as inbred in us as a compass for wellness and wholeness. Yet, it requires our acknowledgement to unlock and activate for our well-being, and through us the

world's health, by living in relationship through faith with the Divine.

These days much effort is going toward physical DNA results in defining family ties, all well and good. But how much more important is expending effort in pursuing the DNA of our soul, of our createdness, what grounds us in Love against what can be forces of darkness that can overwhelm, distort, and destroy health and wellness?

As much as pursuit of many healthy interests in moderation makes for a well-balanced life, so much more is the benefit of faith that feeds the soul, heart and mind constantly, leading to the DNA of our createdness centering life and the global human community in righteousness; the Way of our Lord and Savior, whose journey to the cross to help us overcome the world we endeavor to learn more about this season.

— *The Rev. Andrew Borden, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

## **Tuesday, March 2, 2021**

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### Faith Is Confidence

Scripture: Genesis 22:6-19; Hebrews 11:1-3

Genesis 22:6-19

6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram[a] caught by its horns. He went over

and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

Hebrews 11:1-3

1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

**I**n a year in which uncertainty has tried us, and anxiety has sought to overcome hope, it is helpful to remember that “faith is confidence,” especially in that which we cannot see. We cannot see the tiny virus, yet we see its results and feel its power.

As we now turn to the promises of science and her vaccines with our deep desire for reprieve from the disease that currently plagues us, be not afraid. Inspiration is not confined to breathing. Just as the creator breathed life into Adam, the first inspiration, it also means to be filled with “the Spirit.”

Let us remember that “the Lord will provide” includes the understanding that “the universe formed at God’s command” includes the inspiration of his beloved people.

Beloved, do not ignore the ram in the bushes. Get vaccinated as soon as allowed. The Lord has provided.

— *Rev. Cheryl Leshay, M.Div., Community Minister and Professional Chaplain,  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester*

**Wednesday, March 3, 2021**

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Scripture: Jeremiah 30:16-17

16 “But all who devour you will be devoured; all your enemies will go into exile. Those who plunder you will be plundered; all who make spoil of you I will despoil.

17 But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds.”

**W**e’re coming up on a year since the state stood still. While there is (finally) a glimmer of hope on the horizon, we are still trudging through this. This has been a long year — some might say the longest year. This pandemic has changed every single one of us. We are isolated, disconnected, hiding our pain behind masks.

I, like many, have gone through mental health struggles this year. My anxiety level is at a new high. I am worried about everything, all the time. Some days I just go through the motions, pretending that this new normal is sunshine and rainbows. Pretending that teaching through a screen is the same as before. Pretending that anything is the same as before.

Recently I read that stress is like standing in a storm, anxiety is waiting for an impending storm, and worry is wearing a raincoat all the time. I like to think that faith and hope can fit into this as well — that they’re the shining sun. They make things a little brighter, a little clearer, and dry up the rain that does fall. Reading this passage from Jeremiah reminded me that even when it feels like I am drowning or I am stuck in this storm, I am not alone. None of us are.

— *Steph Harms, Grace Ministries, Zion*

## **Thursday, March 4, 2021**

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Scripture: Psalm 19:1

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.”

**P**salm 19 is a hymn to God as creator of nature. The sky and the successive days and nights are personified as members of a choir singing God’s praises. Verse 3 says, “There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.” When have you sensed that creation was praising God? Some of us might hear the ocean praising God as the waves crash upon the shore.

Others of us may sense the lilacs and roses praising God as they put forth their magnificent fragrances at the first signs of spring and summer. In verse 5, we read: “In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens ...” a vision of the breathtaking sunrises and sunsets we all have witnessed throughout our lives.

I am reminded of one of my favorite Lutheran hymns “Earth and All Stars” LSB 817 or LW438. “Heaven and Earth, loud rushing planets, sing to the Lord a new song. Hail, wind and rain, snowstorms, flowers and trees, loud rustling leaves, sing to the Lord a new song.” Help us to take the time to listen to nature as she sings her praises to God.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer,” Psalm 19:14.

—*Jackie Walsh, Bethel/Grace Ministries*

**Friday, March 5, 2021**

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**Scripture:** Acts 7:30-40 from God’s Word Translation

30 “[A] Messenger appeared to [Moses] in the flames of a burning bush in the desert of Mount Sinai. 31 [He] was surprised when he saw this. As he went closer to look at the bush, the voice of the Lord said to him, 32 ‘I am the God of your ancestors — the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses began to tremble and didn’t dare to look at the bush. 33 The Lord told him, ‘Take off your sandals. The place where you’re standing is holy ground. 34 I’ve seen how my people are mistreated in Egypt. I’ve heard their groaning and have come to rescue them. So now I’m sending you to Egypt.’

35 “This is the Moses whom the Israelites rejected by saying, ‘Who made you our ruler and judge?’ This is the one God sent to free them and to rule them with the help of the Messenger who appeared to him in the bush. 36 This is the man who led our ancestors out of Egypt. He is the person who did amazing things and worked miracles in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the desert for 40 years. 37 This is the same Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will send you a prophet, an Israelite like me.’ 38 This is the Moses who was in the assembly in the desert. Our ancestors and the Messenger who spoke to him on Mount Sinai were there with him. Moses received life-giving

messages to give to us, 39 but our ancestors were not willing to obey him. Instead, they pushed him aside, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt. 40 They told Aaron, ‘We don’t know what has happened to this Moses, who led us out of Egypt. So make gods who will lead us.’

**A**fter 40 years had passed, a messenger appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say, “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

God told Moses to take off his sandals because Moses was standing on holy ground. God said God had seen the oppression of God’s people in Egypt and came down to free them. Moses was being sent back to Egypt by God, where they had rejected him and turned back to Egypt. They even asked Moses, “Who made you ruler and judge?” He was sent by God, who appeared to him in the burning bush.

Just as the people of that time needed to prepare themselves, so do we need to look into our own hearts. Are we prepared for the Lenten season and Easter? How and what is God revealing to us?

We need to humble ourselves and admit our shortcomings, our sins in thought, word, and deed. Are we rejecting God and/or Jesus? We need to repent of our sins. We are to Love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our minds, and with all our souls, and our neighbors as ourselves.

How are we going to interact with God? What are we revealing to those around us of God’s Love and Grace? What are we revealing of ourselves, and how are we letting the light of God’s love shine through us for others?

Lord, please make us channels of Your peace! We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

— *Roberta Briggs, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

**Saturday, March 6, 2021**

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## Between Obedience and Praise

Scripture: Psalm 19, Exodus 19:16-25; Mark 9:2-8

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”

When reading Psalm 19, I notice a calm comes over me. I don't hear the words law, precepts, or commandment in their usual tone as oppressive rules but as gentle boundaries that hold one tight and provide important cues to the good life.

In fact, if we were to step back and look at the entire psalter, we see an interesting composition. Psalm 1 and Psalm 150, the bookends of the psalter, are “odd psalms, conspicuous for their peculiar character.” As Walter Brueggemann notes, “These are psalms that wouldn't appear just anywhere in the collection, but are specifically placed, carefully selected, in order to provide a special framing of the psalter.” What we have in Psalm 1 is a psalm of obedience; is Psalm 150 a psalm of praise. Again, a clue to the good life. When we live our lives between “obedience and praise” of God, life is provided in abundance.

The bookends provide a “shape of life” that Israel is to abide in covenant living with God. Life works this way because God's demands are nonnegotiable, and because God's fidelity is found reliable. We live within the pious, trusting, confident boundaries of obedience and praise. They are life enormous gentle hands that hold and keep us in loving care.

The law of the Lord is perfect; the decrees of the Lord are sure; the precepts of the Lord are right; the commandment of the Lord is clear; the ordinances are true. We live life between obedience and praise, more to be desire are they than gold.

— *Rev. Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant Church*

## Third Sunday in Lent, March 7, 2021

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### The Cross of Christ

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17; John 2:13-22; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Jesus never stayed in Jerusalem during the week we call Holy, but chose to go in and out of the city each day, choosing to sleep in the beauty and gardens of the Kidron Valley. Each day, Christ and his disciples traveled into Jerusalem, entering through the “Golden Gate,” which leads directly into the expansive colonnades of the temple. But on the walk up to the city, they would have encountered hundreds of crosses, some with bodies still on them. These crosses were placed on the roads leading into the seven gates of Jerusalem as a cipher, a message, a sure sign that if one crossed the boundaries of Roman Imperial law, this would be their fate: the cross.

The Romans used crucifixion to make an example of those who disturbed the good life of Roman peace. It was a public display of Roman “law and order.” Roman citizens were not crucified. Crucifixion was reserved for revolutionaries, terrorists, the worst criminals, and slaves. “Cross,” says Fred Craddock, “had the connotations of ugliness, contempt, weakness, loser, criminal, slave, unpatriotic lowlife.”

God turned this on its head, making the cross the symbol of life and a display to the world that imperial domination systems that concoct an array of violent torture apparatuses are not how we solve the world’s problems. The world is saved by the resurrection power of the living Christ and the empty cross.

— *Rev. Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant Church*

**Monday, March 8, 2021**

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Scripture: Psalm 84

2 My soul years, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

3 Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young — a place near your altar, Lord Almighty, my Kind and my God.

1 Kings 6:1-4

1 In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light.

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

**A**s beautiful and encrusted with priceless metals and jewels Solomon's Temple was, the Shekinah Glory, God's Light departed from it and it did not stand through the conquest of Jerusalem.

No one can find or fashion a more beautiful or lasting home than the one Jesus offers us in Himself. Christ Jesus brings us into our home in Him, right here, right now. It is a truth which only the eyes of the heart and soul can see and understand. Jesus opened His arms and opened up His heart unto earthly death to take us into the Kingdom of Truth and Light through and in Him, our home now and always. I love the song that the children sing. It speaks to what riches and jewels mean to Jesus, our Home, our dwelling place.

“Little children, little children,  
Who love their Redeemer,  
Are the jewels, precious jewels,  
His loved and His own.”

— Pam Sutton, *Grace Ministries, Bethel Campus*

**Tuesday, March 9, 2021**

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How Lovely!

Scripture: Psalm 84: 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.”

**M**y wife comes from a wonderful pedigree of musicians. Her paternal grandmother was a concert pianist with perfect pitch. Early in his career, her father had to discern a call between ministry of the Chicago Lyric Opera. Robin herself sang in one of the nation’s finest choral groups in high school, and a wonderful concert choir in university. When I hear Brahms’ “How Lovely Are Your Dwelling Places,” my mind shoots back 35 years to hearing the university choir sing that gorgeous piece in Queen of All Saints Basilica, Chicago.

Of all the psalms that celebrate Zion (the city of God) and its temple as God’s dwelling place, the 84th has been most acclaimed. The temple was sought after because the soul intuitively yearns for God. The psalm includes the desire of birds of the air that sought out the comfort and rest found within its walls. One day in the temple courts is better than a thousand elsewhere, the old contemporary song repeats. The psalm sets incomparable value on being present in the place of presence for even the shortest of time and in the most minimal way.

Oh, that we would long for Zion as those of old. The ancients had the visible signs of ark and temple to “go up to.” But, as commentator James Mays says, “for Christians, it does not mean for us that God is placeless.” Faith must take the form of movement. One must go toward God. One must seek out the presence in all places and at all times. God dwells in heaven, but also has place on earth, and we must “go” to God. So, make the journey!

— *Rev. Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant Church*

## Temple: The House of Yahweh or Jupiter?

Scripture: Mark 11:15-19

In his final week, Jesus came in and out of the city, choosing always to spend the night beyond the city walls and the chaos of life within Jerusalem. The temple was THE place for the Jewish faithful, but there was a problem. Judaism's high priest was collaborating with Rome. This influence spilled over to the temple, so that building was known both as the house of God on earth and the institutional seat of submission to Rome.

God's insistence to His people is that we be people not only of worship but also of justice. In fact, there is ancient prophetic precedence that God desires justice over worship. Going back to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 7:12-14), there is a threat that the house of God (in Shiloh) will be destroyed if Israel's worship becomes a substitute for justice in the land of God. On Monday morning, the best time to make a scene, at the entrance to the temple, Jesus, by turning over the tables and throwing the business characters out, symbolically shuts down the temple because it has become a den (a safe house, or refuge) for robbers. Justice has been squeezed out.

People's everyday injustices make them robbers, and they think the temple will be their safe-house, hideaway, place of security. The temple is not the place where the robbery occurs, but the place where robbers go for refuge.

Does divine worship excuse you from justice, regular attendancxe save you from the equitable distribution of land? No! This was a symbolic action in which Jesus demanded worship AND justice like behavior. The temple was as the fig tree. If the fruit that comes of it is no good or is absent altogether, then God will destroy it.

— *Rev. Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant Church*

## Thursday, March 11, 2021

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Scripture: Genesis 9:8-17 from God's Word Translation

8 God also said to Noah and his sons, 9 "I am going to make my promise to you, your descendants, 10 and every living being that is with you — birds, domestic animals, and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ship — every living thing on earth. 11 I am making my promise to you. Never again will all life be killed by floodwaters. Never again will there be a flood that destroys the earth."

12 God said, "This is the sign of the promise I am giving to you and every living being that is with you for generations to come. 13 I will put my rainbow in the clouds to be a sign of my promise to the earth. 14 Whenever I form clouds over the earth, a rainbow will appear in the clouds. 15 Then I will remember my promise to you and every living animal. Never again will water become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember my everlasting promise to every living animal on earth."

17 So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the promise I am making to all life on earth."

**W**e all know from the story in Genesis of the great rains that flooded the earth where Noah lived, destroying the land and everything living on it except for Noah, his sons, their families and the plants and animals that were taken on the ark.

God told Noah and his sons that he was going to establish a covenant with them and their descendants after them along with every living creature that was with them, including the birds, livestock, all the wild animals — all the living creatures that came out of the ark with them. God established a covenant to watch over us.

As a sign of the covenant, God set a rainbow in the clouds to remind humanity of that covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind.

I love these readings and their meaning. I think of them every time I see a rainbow and remember this promise of God! I tell the story to anyone who will listen, and love to tell it to children. It also reminds me of what my mother told us as children about thunder and lightning: She would take us onto the porch of the tenement we lived and say, "God holds the lightning in God's hand. The thunder roars at God's command." Oh, the comfort that has given me all these years. I found that very comforting as a young child, and told it to my children when they were growing up as well. For God watches over and helps to guide our lives. We don't have to be afraid. We just

have to let go and let God take over.

From Ephesians 1:4-6: “For [God] chose us in [Godself] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in [God’s] sight. In love [God] predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, in accordance with [God’s] pleasure and will — to the praise of [God’s] glorious grace, which [God has freely given us in the one [God] loves.”

Amen!

— *Roberta Briggs, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

**Friday, March 12, 2021**

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Scripture: Psalm 107:1-3 from The Message

1 Give thanks to the LORD because [the Lord] is good, [whose] mercy endures forever.  
2 Let the people the LORD defended repeat these words. They are the people [the Lord] defended from the power of their enemies  
3 and gathered from other countries, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

**W**ho are the people that perhaps stood up for us, defending us at various times in our life when things weren’t going so well?

The answers will vary among us. I can remember various teachers over the years coming to my defense when I stood up for values many others in my class didn’t accept: of justice and equity.

I am thankful for my teacher’s example and help!

Our psalmist speaks of God’s oversight, working through leaders in tune with God to make a difference for the safety and well-being for those under threat.

The message is the same in our generation, in that God seeks to help each of us in our orbits of

work and play in being kept from harm's way. Implied is our willingness to be helped and for following God's lead as part of the solution: None of us can "stick our head in the sand" and put responsibility all upon God.

As journey to the cross this Lent, might we think upon God's endurance for humanity and this creation, and persistent willingness to help each of us, and our role, too, in being part of the solutions for creating a healthier global community of humanity in the Kingdom amongst us now, where there is truly no east or west, north or south, just the entirety of sisters and brothers within creation.

— *The Rev. Andrew Borden, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

## **Saturday, March 13, 2021**

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### Born of Spirit

Scripture: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Numbers 20:22-29; John 3:1-13

The vision here is of endings and beginnings. I know something of the experience described in the Book of Numbers referenced for this day. On the day of my ordination into the ministry, my father, the Reverend Robert Payson, then retired from active ministry due to a devastating stroke, approached me the time of the robing. Walking slowly with his walker in hand, he stood beside me and proceeded to remove his robe and place it on my shoulders. It was a deeply moving and devastating moment. At the touch of his hand and the feeling of the weight of his robes, I took on the mantle of the living tradition to which he had given his life, one to which I now promised my life. It was a moment of both death and birth, a moment of baptism in the spirit of love which I first heard from his lips and from my mother's: "You are my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased."

When I read the words of John 3, I return to this moment in my life. We are born again in our

lives when we are touched by such love and calling. For many, it is a moment marked by the formal occasion of baptism; for others, the spirit pursues them for years until they have ears to hear, eyes to see and heart to understand.

During this Lenten season, let us give thanks for such moments in our lives, and may we take this time to renew our commitment to be purveyors of such love, while we live deeply into that Great Love we are called to serve and to which we are summoned to bear witness.

— *Rev. Aaron Payson, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester*

**Sunday, March 14, 2021**

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## What Are You Looking At?

Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

“**S**o Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.” Numbers 21:9

The caduceus, which is the symbol for medicine, is said to be based on a story from Greco-Roman history when Mercury (Hermes in Greek) attempted to stop a fight between two serpents by his rod at them, whereupon they twined themselves around the rod.

The more ancient origin is perhaps better understood in the book of Numbers, which reveals the power of a similar symbol as an agent of healing, sent by God, to provide mercy to those in the Hebrew community who had abandoned their faith and hope. God instructs Moses to set a serpent upon a stake, the sight of which would heal them instantly.

Such is the power of symbols. They have the capacity to heal, to inspire, to unite. They also have the potential to provoke destruction and division.

The author of John points to this ancient Hebrew symbol as the foundation for witnessing the placement of Jesus upon a rod, to be raised up, symbol of the world's destructive proclivities and sign of God's judgement on such activity. For the faithful, it is a symbol that inspires hope and faithfulness to the ethic and teaching of one who gave his life so that we might learn more productive ways of living and be inspired as agents for the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

During this Lenten season, might we pause to consider that which truly inspires our faith and our actions. What symbols draw us more deeply into the heart of our faith and the vision of a world made whole?

— *Rev. Aaron Payson, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester*

## **Monday, March 15, 2021**

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Scripture: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 from God's Word Translation

1 Brothers and sisters, you are holy partners in a heavenly calling. So look carefully at Jesus, the apostle and chief priest about whom we make our declaration of faith. 2 Jesus is faithful to God, who appointed him, in the same way that Moses was faithful when he served in God's house. 3 Jesus deserves more praise than Moses in the same way that the builder of a house is praised more than the house. 4 After all, every house has a builder, but the builder of everything is God. 5 Moses was a faithful servant in God's household. He told the people what God would say in the future. 6 But Christ is a faithful son in charge of God's household. We are his household if we continue to have courage and to be proud of the confidence we have.

**M**aybe you grew up in a house with a sibling. And maybe, just maybe, one of your parents asked them to find you to tell you they wanted you to take care of some task you hadn't gotten to yet.

Seem familiar?

And your response would likely have been to tell your sibling to "Get lost!" because you didn't want to do what was asked of you.

Next, you were the recipient of a more powerful visitation ...

God has worked on our behalf through intermediaries like the prophets for our corporate and individual well-being from the time our first mother birthed us into existence and the Divine made Godself known to our race. But, as many times petulant children, we have been unwilling to “hear” and respond.

In the person of Jesus, we have the full authority and Presence in human form having given up the full compass of Divine modality for a time to love us into understanding for a relationship, faith WITH God, that makes the human creature whole.

May we remember, daily, this sacrifice of love to bring us to our senses.

— *The Rev. Andrew Borden, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

**Tuesday, March 16, 2021**

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## How to Wrestle With Despair

Scripture: Psalm 107:1-16; Numbers 20:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

**H**ave you ever been “that” frustrated? So frustrated, so scared, so angry that you would strike out in fear? If you are human, then the answer is yes. The readings today from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures speak to this reality.

Beyond the moralisms that so often accompany the commentaries on these passages — warnings not to test God, warnings not to act out or lose your faith (to say nothing of your control) — what is at the heart of these stories is the lesson that we are all bidden to wrestle with despair, but never allow despair to have the last word. Here I’m relying on the admonition of Cornell West, revered philosopher and theologian. Hear his words:

“Those who have never despaired have neither lived nore loved. Hope is inseparable from

despair. Those of us who truly hope make despair a constant companion whom we out-wrestle every day owing to our commitment to justice, love, and hope.”

Here is the essence of the transgression at the heart of the stories in Number and 1 Corinthians. We are all bidden to wrestle with despair, and in the midst of that battle, we are also bidden to rely on that strength, which is beyond us yet within us, to meet the challenge at hand. We must have the courage to reach beyond our own humanness in the moment and be open to receiving the gift of divine grace and mercy that can carry us beyond the moment and into fuller life.

During this Lenten season, let us find moments of gratitude for the divine strength that carries us out of despair, and let us give thanks for the opportunities we have to bear witness to this power in the midst of the battles that might otherwise consume us.

— *Rev. Aaron Payson, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester*

## **Wednesday, March 17, 2021**

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### Lost and Found

Scripture: Psalm 107:4-7

- 4 Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.
- 5 They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.
- 6 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.
- 7 He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.

Today’s psalm is a lot longer, but these four verses stuck out to me. It was like the Psalmist was talking directly to me, about me. There have been a few times that I felt like I was wandering, finding no way and no place to settle.

I teach third grade, and I absolutely love it, but it was a long road to get here. I graduated in 2013 but struggled to land a full-time teaching position. I worked as a substitute, I worked as an aide, I even worked at McDonald’s. I started to lose hope. I just figured I would never be a “real” teacher.

I felt hopeless. I felt like a failure. I felt distressed. I decided to let go and let God — literally. I applied to be an ELCA missionary in Asia. On theme, I didn't get that job, either. But God did open a window for me. A friend sent me a link and, to make a long story short, I moved to Beijing to teach English.

I'm not saying Beijing was the city where I could settle, but it did reignite my passion for being in the classroom. Now I am settled and loving it. I wake up every day excited to go to work. I'm no longer hungry and thirsty, feeling like my life is ebbing away.

Why do I share this? Well, I think everyone has times when they feel like verses 4-5. Maybe you feel that way right now. Don't worry. Cry out to the Lord, and he will help lead you to exactly where you are meant to be.

— *Steph Harms, Grace Ministries, Zion*

**Friday, March 19, 2021**

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Scripture: Hebrews 4:14-5;4 from God's Word Translation

14 We need to hold on to our declaration of faith: We have a superior chief priest who has gone through the heavens. That person is Jesus, the Son of God. 15 We have a chief priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are, but he didn't sin.

16 So we can go confidently to the throne of God's kindness to receive mercy and find kindness, which will help us at the right time.

5 Every chief priest is chosen from humans to represent them in front of God, that is, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin. 2 The chief priest can be gentle with people who are ignorant and easily deceived, because he also has weaknesses. 3 Because he has weaknesses, he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins in the same way that he does for the sins of his people.

4 No one takes this honor for himself. Instead, God calls him as he called Aaron.

**I**magine what pure wisdom must be like.

Solomon asked for wisdom from God, received it, was acknowledged for it by the Queen of Sheba, who visited to discover its authentic nature. But then, in later years, his management as monarch of Israel lost its luster; the human creature wearing out in persevering in wisdom.

Jesus is not only the embodiment of Wisdom, as the Old Testament books refer to this attribute of the God-head, but is also the Word of God personified. To imagine pure wisdom, then, is to perceive and get to know the reality of this Jesus and his ministry.

God in human form meant, in the person of Jesus, getting inside of the human head and heart. He experienced evil in the desert for 40 days immediately following his baptism by John before setting out on three years of ministry. Knowing the frailties of our race from the inside out, the Incarnate was able to speak Wisdom as Truth to our nature and need, so that our weaknesses might not overcome us: Jesus' death on the cross, and subsequent resurrection, prove how God cannot be overcome by this world's destructive tendencies, so too, through faith any of us can persevere and not be overcome.

May we know this in our lives and so become increasingly whole.

— *The Rev. Andrew Borden, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

**Tuesday, March 23, 2021**

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Scripture: Psalm 119:9-16 from The Message

- 9 How can a young person keep [their] life pure? [They] can do it by holding on to your word.  
10 I wholeheartedly searched for you. Do not let me wander away from your commandments.  
11 I have treasured your promise in my heart so that I may not sin against you.  
12 Thanks be to you, O LORD. Teach me your laws.  
13 With my lips I have repeated every regulation that comes from your mouth.  
14 I find joy in the way shown by your written instructions more than I find joy in all kinds of riches.  
15 I want to reflect on your guiding principles and study your ways.  
16 Your laws make me happy. I never forget your word.

**A**s a young teenager you have lots of forces working on you: pressure from peers, parental suggestions, media propaganda, the changes your body and mind are going through.

It can be a crazy time.

My dad was also a pastor, and sometimes led what amounted to revivals in the United Methodist Church. During one such weekend I had met with a group of high school youth in a session where many shared testimonials about their faith-life with God. Being moved by that experience, I went off by myself and told God I was giving my life over into God's hands to lead me, and do with me as God wished.

All I can say is that my life has been blessed in many and various ways over the years. Not that I haven't encountered difficulties, like everyone else, but that I never lose hope or become depressed because I know I am not alone; I simply trust in God to bring about resolution in the ways that only God can work out.

The psalmist is talking about the same thing; a young person, in the formative years, learning to trust in God's word, treasuring it in their heart and leaning into God's WAY through faith that makes a person content, thankful for relationship and willing to be Godly inspired and led.

The Incarnation came about through God's desire for personally recovering the teaching given to us in ancient days that humanity had lost sight of. In the person of Jesus, the teaching, healing

and preaching exemplified the hope of the Divine in humanity finding our center, our hope, our strength through faith. Jesus' earthly work points up the Love seeking to fulfill each of our lives in the blessing our time on earth is meant to become.

As we journey to the cross this Lent, may we come closer through faith in embodying the Grace and Mercy that are the Essence which is God.

— *The Rev. Andrew Borden, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

## **Friday, March 26, 2021**

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### Enduring Love

Scripture: Psalm 118

1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

2 Let Israel say: "His love endures forever."

Today's psalm is short and sweet. We've probably read it a million times. At first glance, you might say, "Is that it? Of course I give thanks to the Lord ..." That is why I want to focus on the second part of these verses, the part that isn't telling us what to do, but what He does for us.

His love endures forever.

I am a (pretty poor) runner. One area where I really struggle is endurance. I can keep a pretty steady pace for a few miles, but then fatigue sets in and I find myself slowing down. More often than not, I switch to walking for a few minutes and lose my momentum altogether. Some days I just don't even attempt the endurance part of it. I'll just do intervals so I can run a few minutes, walk a few minutes. It's safe to say I do not endure forever. I might endure for 3 or 4 miles, but that's it.

Lucky for us, God is better at loving than I am at running. He doesn't slow down or take a day

off. His wireless headphones might die, his water bottle might be empty, it might be too cold out — but He shows up.

Wait. Does that mean He loved me that time I messed up at work? Yes.

What about that time I cut the guy off so I could beat the red light? Yes

What about the time I skipped church so I could sleep in? Ask your pastor.

— *Steph Harms, Grace Ministries, Zion*

**Saturday, March 27, 2021**

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## Faith Is Confidence

Scripture: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 from The Message

Give thanks to the Lord because [the Lord] is good, [whose] mercy endures forever.

2 Israel should say, “[The Lord’s] mercy endures forever.”

19 Open the gates of righteousness for me. I will go through them and give thanks to the LORD>

20 This is the gate of the LORD through which righteous people will enter.

21 I give thanks to you, because you have answered me. You are my savior.

22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

23 The LORD is responsible for this, and it is amazing for us to see.

24 This is the day the LORD has made. Let’s rejoice and be glad today!

25 We beg you, O LORD, save us! We beg you, O LORD, give us success!

26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the LORD’s house.

27 The LORD is God, and has given us light. March in a festival procession with branches to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I give thanks to you. My God, I honor you highly.

29 Give thanks to the LORD [who] is good, [whose] mercy endures forever.

**T**he One who created us did so through a heart of Love, and inclination toward Grace and Mercy, the true Essence that is God: our breath and being gifted with these attributes to be

activated by connection, through faith, our “uplink” with the Creator to complete and enable a whole and well-balanced life-walk.

The chink in this “armor” of Grace and Mercy through Love came with the privilege of free will: and see how well our collective history reveals our nature and capacity in honoring life’s gift, and responsibility toward each other. This psalm speaks to God’s ever-Presence in assisting our race in finding more of the Holy and encouraging our leaning into relationship, though our tendency is in forgetting and falling off of the Way.

We read that God has given us “light”, a metaphor referring to patient, caring work for the sake of our many times wayward race in revealing how to tell good from bad, so to make better choices and not fall into the traps living apart from faith generally leads to.

Jesus represents this Divine intent personally coming a final time through Mercy to our race in revealing once again the basics any one of us needs to know in following the good intent our Creator hopes for us and the Kingdom in this place called earth: from John’s gospel, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord to die, and rise from death to show us the Way, and prove that through relationship the world cannot dominate us, but that Love, Grace and Mercy will always prevail and endure!

— *The Rev. Andrew Borden, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

## **Monday, March 29, 2021**

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### Of Justice & Love

Scripture: Isaiah 42:4; Psalm 36:5-6

“He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.” Isaiah 42:4

“Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.  
“Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgements are life the great deep, you save humans and animals alike, O LORD.” Psalm 36:5-6

**T**oday, I encourage you to reflect on our Climate Crisis. We have squandered our most precious resource: the land on which we live and the deep oceans. Factories and cars pollute the air we breathe. Mining strips the value of our precious Earth. Plastic floats in the deep seas. The polar ice caps are melting, and the water is rising.

My Unitarian principles include “respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part.” The Bible provides great imagery for establishing justice in the earth and coastlands. Greta Thornberg tells us that there is no time to wait. We have, thankfully, rejoined the Paris Climate Accords. John Kerry holds a U.S. Cabinet post on climate issues. Due to the current pandemic, we can see the results of not driving our cars as much. The air in entire cities appears cleaner in pictures. Hope is renewed for a better, cleaner future. We must act deliberately and intentionally.

Take a small step today to reduce your carbon footprint. Reduce. Reuse. Recycle. Contemplate your role in our web of existence. The Lord will “establish justice in the earth.” “The coastlands wait for his teaching.”

— *Dianne Mann, The Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester*

**Wednesday, March 31, 2021**

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Scripture: Isaiah 50:4-9a from God’s Word Translation

The Almighty LORD will teach me what to say, so I will know how to encourage weary people.  
Morning after morning he will wake me to listen like a student.

5 The Almighty LORD will open my ears. I will not rebel, nor will I turn away from [the Lord].

6 I will offer my back to those who whip me and my cheeks to those who pluck hairs out of my beard. I will not turn my face away from those who humiliate me and spit on me.

7 The Almighty LORD helps me. That is why I will not be ashamed. I have set my face like a flint. I know that I will not be put to shame.

8 The one who pronounces me innocent is near. Who will bring a case against me? Let us confront each other! Who accuses me? Let him confront me!

9 The Almighty LORD helps me. Who will find me guilty? They will all wear our like a garment. Moths will eat them.

**P**art of the “suffering servant” lines of scripture, these verses have often been projected onto Jesus as predictive of his future life-walk.

Another understanding involves the text as representing an unidentified person of faith in the Hebrew community of the day of the second prophet known as Isaiah, who, in living out their faith, was put upon by others not appreciating their message and witness around the means of Grace and Mercy.

To me this is spot on, because the reality is for those creatures living in the dark scurrying around when light is cast upon them; in this metaphor, the knowledge and reality of God, the light of Christ (the Word), revealing where adjustments toward lives of wholeness and wellness are needing to be made and not appreciated by those complacent with the darkness.

This day of Holy Week in the church separates us one day from our Lord’s arrest on the Mount of Olives, near to where he began the palm procession a mere handful of days before. Knowing the full range of human emotion in real time, this Godman had to have felt the stress of the world’s darkness not pleased with the light he cast upon it and beginning to rebel in force!

As we think upon Jesus’ testimony of Ultimate Love dedicated to the enlightenment of humanity as to the orientation of the Divine for our sake, may we consider how our embodying Grace and Mercy, honoring the sacrifice of our Lord, may be unappreciated at times, but through the Spirit’s direction be of benefit in helping the light brightly nourish more of creation for the sake of the kingdom as darkness fades away from its beam.

— *The Rev. Andrew Borden, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

## Good Friday, April 2, 2021

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Scripture: Hebrews 10:16-25 from The Message

16 “This is the promise that I will make to them after those days, says the Lord: ‘I will put my teachings in their hearts and write them in their minds’.”

17 Then [God] adds, “I will no longer hold their sins and their disobedience against them.”

18 When sins are forgiven, there is no longer any need to sacrifice for sins.

19 Brothers and sisters, because of the blood of Jesus we can now confidently go into the holy place. 20 Jesus has opened a new and living way for us to go through the curtain. (The curtain is his own body.) 21 We have a superior priest in charge of God’s house. 22 We have been sprinkled with his blood to free us from a guilty conscience, and our bodies have been washed with clean water. So we must continue to come to him with a sincere heart and strong faith. 23 We must continue to hold firmly to our declaration of faith. The one who made the promise is faithful.

24 We must also consider how to encourage each other to show love and to do good things. 25 We should not stop gathering together with other believers, as some of you are doing. Instead, we must continue to encourage each other even more as we see the day of the Lord coming.

**A**tonement theory is huge among many calling themselves Jesus followers; the idea that our Lord had to die in place of humanity’s overall sinfulness which is a condition of our birth into the world.

**T**he other view is that all people are born through grace, and that Jesus’ sacrifice, his death, resurrection and ascension prove the great lengths God has committed to follow in proving that the world cannot overcome God; that through faith we cannot be let down, or overcome by any condition or challenge.

It’s true that Jesus was crucified and physically murdered. But he came back bodily with power to complete the ministry of reconciliation with humanity!

In other words, Jesus dies on the cross to save us from ourselves!

Over and over again throughout recorded human history, we find God’s coming to help humanity out, and humanity’s being overcome by the world, then God coming to help, then humanity losing it again ...

In the Incarnation we have our Creator coming in person to once and for all summarize the tables of the Law; if we would just love God with all our heart, mind and soul, and others as ourselves, then that is EVERYTHING (the placement within our hearts and written within our minds the embodiment of Essence which is God and the backbone of intended life — Grace and Mercy)!

As we prepare in short order to celebrate with Alleluias our Lord's resurrection, may we consider on this somber day the sacrifice made for our sakes, and come away with a deeper appreciation for the breadth and depth of the Almighty who created the entire 'verse, but is intimately concerned for and connected with each of us; hoping and "pulling" for us every moment!

— *The Rev. Andrew Borden, Grace Ministries - ELCA*

## **Easter Day, Sunday, April 4, 2021**

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### Easter in Christian Life Today

Scripture: Acts 10:34-43; Mark 16:1-8; Isaiah 25:6-9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

**W**e have come to the end of our journey, which is the beginning of Resurrection Living! Two themes emerge as we celebrate this day:

1. Jesus Lives — Jesus continues to be experienced after death. He is no longer flesh and blood, not confined to time or space. He is not dead but a figure of past, present and future.
2. God has vindicated Jesus — This event is God's "Yes" to Jesus, "No" to the powers that executed him. If Jesus is Lord, then the lords of this earth are not. If Jesus is Lord, Caesar is not! If Jesus is Lord, then the almighty dollar is not!

It is said that "Every Sunday is a mini-Easter. Each time we meet together in worship is a reminder that the domination systems of this world are not of God, and they do not have the last Word. "Christ is risen! He has indeed!"

— *Rev. Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant Church*