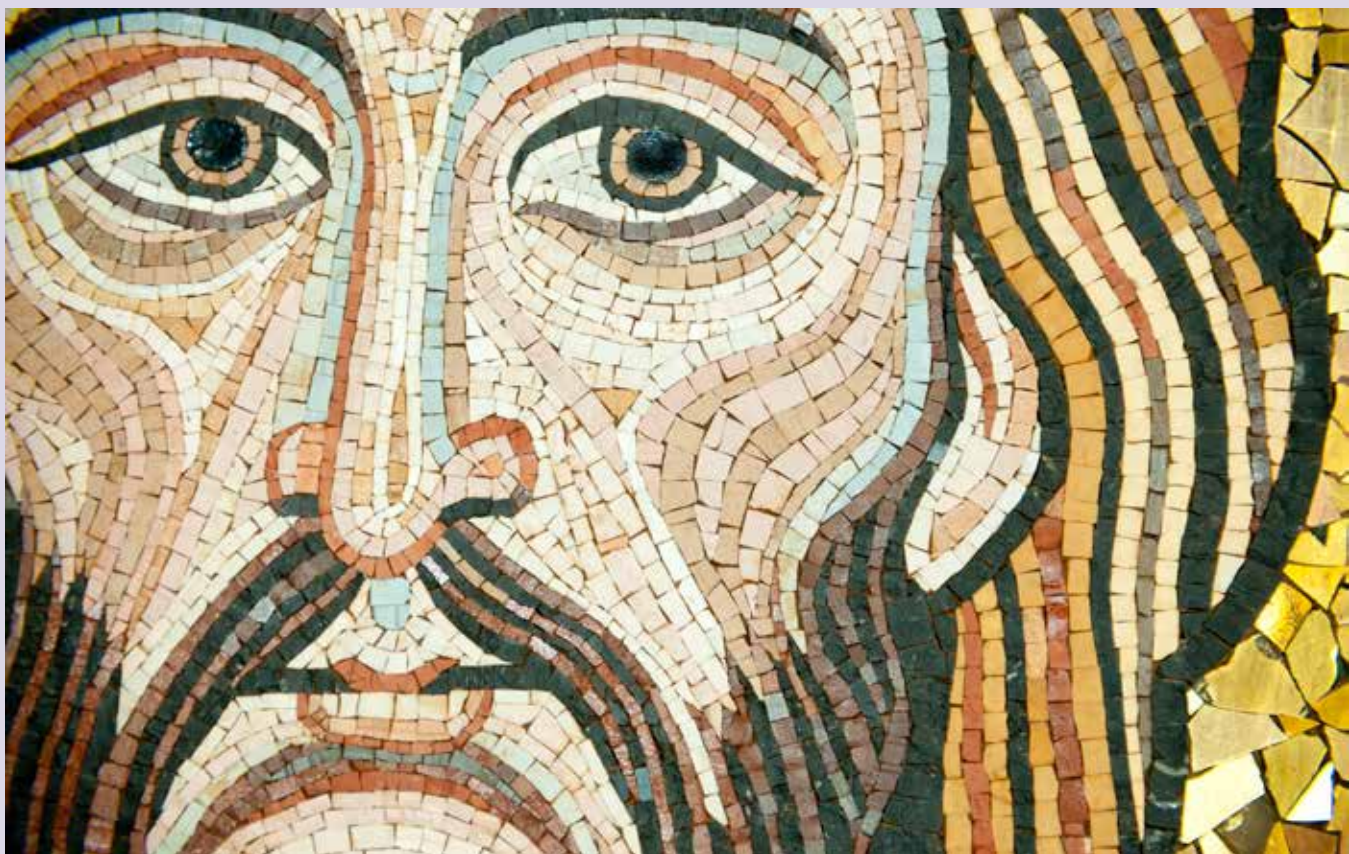


Becoming a Beloved Community

A Matthew 25 journey to the cross



Getty Images



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

Becoming a Beloved

About this Devotional

By Donna Frischknecht Jackson

The season of Lent has often been a time to give up a vice or an indulgence (did someone say chocolate?) or to take on a spiritual discipline such as fasting or meditation.

What if this Lenten season, though, we looked beyond personal disciplines and committed to creating beloved communities in our own backyards — communities reflecting the inclusive and healing love that Jesus modeled as he made his way to the cross?

“Beloved Community” was first coined by 20th-century American philosopher Josiah Royce. However, it was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who popularized it, using “beloved community” often in speeches to illustrate God’s

kingdom as truly a kin-dom. King’s beloved community was not a far-fetched utopia, though, but rather an attainable society based on justice for all and selfless love of one another. For King, a community became “beloved” when every person had their basic needs met.

As production of this devotional approached, I kept thinking about the commitment many of our PC(USA) congregations are making to become Matthew 25 churches. By doing so, they are building beloved communities that are dismantling racism, eradicating poverty and revitalizing ministries by serving others boldly. I wanted to capture the many ways Jesus’ words in Matthew 25 are being lived out and, thus, creating beloved communities. This

devotional itself is a reflection of a beloved community, featuring the voices of 19 ordained ministers, chaplains, lay pastors and ruling elders. These men and women, from different walks of life, belong to the Presbytery of the Pacific — a place where “Matthew 25 work has been going on for years,” says the Rev. Heidi Worthen Gamble, mission catalyst. Their stories — and writing styles — differ, but they all have this in common: They are passionate in wanting to see God’s love reign among them. As you journey with these writers, it is my prayer that a vision for how to become a beloved community where God has placed you dawns this Easter.

Donna Frischknecht Jackson is the editor of Presbyterians Today.

ved Community



Getty Images

Throughout this devotional are early mosaics depicting the life of Christ. Each piece of stone or glass used to create a piece of art will be a reminder that it is together, in community, that we create God's beautiful kingdom. Spend time reflecting on each picture, envisioning what you can add to the "beloved community." Here, a mosaic of Christ and the apostles at Sant'Aquilino chapel, Lombardy, Italy.

Ash Wednesday

February 26 | Frances Wattman Rosenau

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? — Isaiah 58:6-7

How fragile we are. How delicate our existence, when we're truly honest with ourselves. If the practice of fasting shows me anything, it's that I am only a few days away from my body shutting down.

I live in an area where most people are one paycheck away from being on the street. With the rising cost of housing and the stagnation of wages, it can be hard for those in our communities to get by — many fall into homelessness. In a recent community forum, I referred to the people sleeping in tents under a nearby overpass as my neighbors. Someone snapped back, "They really aren't our neighbors. They're not from our town." The familiar words from the Gospel of Luke echoed in my ear, "And who is my neighbor?"

In the face of Isaiah's words, I am convicted. Bring the homeless into my house? Not likely. I am too busy using my children's protection as an excuse. My children, who turn around and beg me for a dollar to give to our "neighbor" sitting outside the post office.

How fragile I am in my sinful blindness. Today as we mark our bodies with the sign of fragility, with ash prominent and black, may our eyes be open in a new way to see the fragility all around us.

God, as I begin this journey of Lent, show me the weaknesses I am blind to. Create space in my heart to sit with uncomfortable and uncertain feelings. Show me one small step to take as I follow you. Amen.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

February 27 | Frances Wattman Rosenau

Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. — Psalm 51:4-6

Returning to Psalm 51 each Lent has become a familiar tradition for me. New words stand out each year as my journey with Jesus marches on. It used to make me uncomfortable how much the author seems to wallow in sinfulness. Now I am open to different possible tones of voice. Perhaps these words are whispered, perhaps exhausted and done pretending, perhaps stated matter-of-factly when both parties know full well what has taken place.

At a community event to commemorate the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I had the opportunity to live out the words of Psalm 51. As someone who identifies as "white American," I notice in myself a desire to jump to solutions. In spaces where marginalized people share their experience of injustice, my discomfort at my privilege means I want to talk a lot: strategizing, problem-solving or prescribing.

Yet God desires "truth in the inward being." God draws me to listen and sit with the truth. I have a lot to learn from the leaders in South Africa after the fall of apartheid. They did not form a Reconciliation Commission but a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We cannot get beyond what we have not acknowledged.

I have to sit with truth in my inward being and listen to the experiences of others — and my own discomfort — with my mouth closed. Then I am open to God "[teaching] me wisdom in my secret heart."

Precious Jesus, show me your truth and guide me in your wise ways for my life. Show me moments to listen to your voice and give me ears to hear. Amen.

A mosaic of Jesus calling the disciples, St. Peter's Basilica, Rome. How are you being called to follow Christ this Lent?



Getty Images

Friday after Ash Wednesday

February 28 | Frances Wattman Rosenau

But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” Then the Lord said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?” — Jonah 4:9–11

You’ve been there — your feet ache, your stomach growls, you’re sweaty and feel the heaviness of exhaustion overtaking you. Maybe your arms are full or you’re trying to do too many things at once. Then one seemingly small thing happens — you drop something, someone says something to set you off — and it seems like the whole world is crashing down around you.

Jonah has a long list of his own. He’s had quite a day. Even his one moment of comfort in a shade tree is taken away, and it seems like his world is ending. God, though, points out that his anger about his own discomfort outweighs his concern for the entire city of Nineveh. I admit, I’ve had

my fair share of Jonah moments. As a parent of young children, juggling schedules and the famous Los Angeles traffic, I can get easily exasperated if I’m not careful.

In a now infamous study, seminary students going to preach on the Good Samaritan were found to be less likely to stop on the way and help someone in distress if they thought they were late than if they thought they had plenty of time. Even when our hearts and words are in the right place, we are susceptible to pass on the other side of the road if we commit the sin of stress.

When I read of Jonah’s anger at losing the shade from the tree, I am reminded to be present in the moment, to be aware of what is going on in my body, to put my concerns in their proper perspective and to take one step in the right direction. Only then can I rejoice over the city of Nineveh or stop to help my neighbor in need.

God of all, you call me to live in the light of your life. When it seems like the world is falling down around me, set my feet firmly in your light. Help me to breathe in your Spirit for the moment and to follow the way of the risen Christ. Amen.



A medieval Byzantine mosaic at the Chora Church in Istanbul, Turkey, shows Jesus reaching out to the blind beggar. Who is God asking you to reach out to?

Getty Images

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

February 29 | Paul Kang

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day? — Luke 13:16

Curiously, a woman asked the pastor, “Do you really want us to wear the orange T-shirt for this Sunday service?” She was referring to the orange T-shirts worn to raise awareness of gun violence prevention. The church was planning a service for the prevention of gun violence.

When the pastor answered “yes” to wearing the T-shirt, a man responded, “I don’t get it. Why should I have to listen about the gun violence prevention at our church service? Isn’t it enough to hear about it on today’s media?”

An elderly man stepped in and said, “I believe we — the faith community — should learn more about the prevention of gun violence because we must care for victims as well as the shooters.”

When Jesus healed a crippled woman on Sabbath day, a synagogue leader blamed Jesus because he broke the Sabbath rule. The true meaning of Sabbath is that one should not become a slave to work. Instead, rest in God. Becoming a slave to work means becoming a workaholic. The people who are workaholics are disconnected from beloved community — family, friends, neighbors and even from God. Disconnection from beloved community often causes anger, and the anger causes misunderstanding and even can lead to violence. And in the end, it imprisons a person in a state of hopelessness.

However, this is why Jesus came — to set the prisoners free. Therefore, we, the followers of Jesus, must minister to those who are disconnected from beloved community and bring them into the conversations that can heal a society.

God of mercy, help us to see what you see so that we are to minister to prisoners who are disconnected from the beloved community. Amen.

First Sunday in Lent

March 1 | Paul Kang

If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it. — Genesis 4:7

“What should we do to prevent gun violence?” the pastor asked the congregation.

Someone said, “Repeal the Second Amendment.” Another responded, “That’s impossible. Nobody can stop the gun lobbying group.”

While the debate was going on, an elderly man stood and said, “Why don’t we take time to listen to God?”

In Genesis, God told Cain, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” In this context, “doing well” doesn’t mean doing good deeds. It means turning back and paying more attention to God.

Cain failed to fully turn to God. He allowed his desires, his anger and his jealousy to lead to murdering his brother, Abel. God warned Cain about what would happen if he failed to manage his anger, but Cain did not listen.

We believe that we are here on earth to carry out God’s will — thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. We have to focus on what God is doing rather than spending our time debating and arguing.

God is already at work. Let’s turn our attention to God. Let’s trust that God, in God’s mysterious ways, will use those who put on an orange T-shirt to stand up against gun violence.

Lord, encourage our churches to focus on what God is doing. Give us more power so we may be able to carry out your will. Amen.

First Monday in Lent

March 2 | Mike Morgan

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ... Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ... Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. — Acts 8:26–30; 35–38

The eunuch, although highly respected within his circle of influence, was considered an “outsider,” excluded by the current religious culture and forbidden from worship within the community. I can hear his pain as he asks, “How can I unless someone is willing to guide me? What is to prevent me from being baptized?”

He sounds like someone who has had an encounter with a community that was unwilling to receive him and prevented him from doing business with God. Unfortunately, this man’s experience is similar for many in our culture today.

The good news is we serve a God who is willing to break down every barrier and tear down all walls to pursue God’s own. This relentless pursuit and inclusion of those once rejected create a beautiful picture of how we are to respond as the beloved community of God.

In the same way that Philip was commanded to “Get up ... go over ... and join,” I wonder who the Holy Spirit might be inviting us to pursue this Lenten season. Do we have the same courage to enter into the lives of those we identify as strangers? Whether you identify with Philip or the eunuch (or someone in between), the good news is that God sees us all as vital members of the beloved community.

Pursuing God, through the power of your Holy Spirit, give us the courage to say “yes” to the stranger, to the marginalized, to the rejected and vulnerable in our midst. Fill us with your grace that we might enter into one another’s lives with hope. May the truth of your love found in Jesus Christ continue to guide and build your beloved community. Amen.

First Tuesday in Lent

March 3 | Mike Morgan

... love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. — Romans 12:10–13

As Americans, many of us feed off of anger, disrespect, fear, serving ourselves, seeking quick results, maintaining independence and extending hostility to strangers. Yes, you read that correctly — hostility to strangers. Don't believe me? Have you not opened your social media news feed today?

As the church, we have an amazing opportunity to model for our culture how to live in a community that is held together by mutual affection, honor, passion, service, hope, patience, perseverance, generosity and hospitality.

“Hospitality” is a good word to meditate on during Lent. Hospitality makes room for others and welcomes with open arms. Hospitality says, “There is always space for another” and “Everyone should feel warmly welcomed and valued.” Christian hospitality is demonstrating God's love toward people who may seem different from us. As God's beloved community, we get to embody a life of hospitality. This Lenten season, may we be a community where all people feel at home among us.

Welcoming God, you went to such great lengths to welcome us. You invite us, who were once strangers, to make our home in you. Empower us, through your Holy Spirit, to embody this same hospitality to those we encounter this Lenten season. Jesus, it is for your glory that we pray this. Amen.

First Wednesday in Lent

March 4 | Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. — Galatians 3:28

I serve as a chaplain in what is known as a “safety-net” hospital, a medical center where all are treated, even if they have no insurance or money to pay. When I visit the patient behind Door No. 1, I have no idea in advance who they are — they might be experiencing homelessness and are gravely ill or maybe they wrapped their Porsche around a freeway embankment and they need a surgeon's expertise. All I know is that they are my siblings in the human family.

By the time I see people, they are cleaned up, sporting a gray hospital gown and a white plastic wristband. No jewelry, no watches, no makeup, no charge on their cellphones — very few clues as to their social standing or the size of their bank account. I open the door and I see their head peeking out of the tousled cream bedding.

These vulnerable patients welcome me in and teach me about the meaning of beloved community as they pour out stories of their trauma and God's mercy and grace. They confide to me their doubts, their hopes and, oftentimes, their faith in God.

The false divisions of social status and wealth dissolve as we reflect on their encounter with mortality. And I find that their prayers are all so similar: for a safe, clean place to live, a renewed commitment to treasure time with their children, or gratitude that by God's mercy they will live to see another day.

God, open our eyes so that we can recognize our siblings in the human family. We pray that you will open our hearts to receive their stories and we might live more deeply into your love for us and the world. Amen.

Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine, as shown in this mosaic from the Chora Church in Istanbul, Turkey. How can we help in times of need, when a community is wanting?

First Thursday in Lent

March 5 | Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. — Romans 8:26

When Bob entered the exam room of the oncology clinic, all who were there with him were hit with his pain. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair, leaning away from the mass that was growing around his liver. His words came in short bursts, pressured by the constant waves of pain.

I found myself holding my breath as I listened, bracing myself against his palatable discomfort. He recited his pain medication regime with the doctors. They agreed on some changes, but it was clear that constant pain would be his new normal. I am not going to lie — it was excruciating to stay in his presence. It was hard to remain so close to his entrenched suffering and be unable to take it away.

Bob asked the doctors to confirm what his body had been telling him, that yet another round of chemo had failed to tame his cancer, that the tumor was spreading and a cure was not possible. He blinked and pressed his lips together. He had known his days were numbered, but he had

needed to talk about it. He hadn't told his family about his illness.

“What matters most to you now, Bob?” a doctor asked.

He fell silent. We waited.

“I haven't seen my mother in 28 years,” Bob said with a groan followed by a sigh too deep for words and tears tumbling down his furrowed cheeks. “I want to see her before God takes me.”

Somehow, Bob's sigh and his tears broke the grip his pain had on the room. As we bore witness to his suffering, the Holy Spirit entered in and began the work of knitting us together as one comforting flesh in the presence of God.

God, we pray that you would pour out your healing presence on each member of the human family today, especially those who we name in our hearts. We ask that you enter in and bring the healing that you have for us — physically, emotionally and spiritually. Complete this good work that you have begun in us. Amen.

Getty Images





Getty Images

First Friday in Lent

March 6 | Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder

... but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.
— 2 Corinthians 12:9

James was a colorful, complex patient. Word on the street was that he was dying, and a steady stream of ex-wives, former lovers, estranged children and long-lost friends appeared at his hospital bedside. He greeted each one with tender kindness, and together they laughed at old photos and sang half-remembered songs. Until recently he had pitched his tent on the beach.

“I love to watch the sky as it fills with the sun’s first light. It’s torture in here,” he told me, as we talked about what it meant for him to come to the end of his life.

He winced as the nurse’s needle missed his vein for the fifth time. By now, he was pretty much just heavily tattooed skin and bones. The nurse called for backup and he asked me to stay — “Let’s talk about the beach; no more death talk for today.”

The next nurse did her best to find a vein. James locked his gaze on my face and flinched with each prick of the needle, but he didn’t say a word to her. That nurse then called for backup. The third nurse came, and I noticed her hand tremble as she searched for a vein. It was then that James paused our conversation. He turned to face the nurse and beamed, “You got this.” A smile flooded the nurse’s face and she taped the new IV in place. James winked at her. “I told you, you had it!”

How can it be that a person who suffers so much can offer grace to someone else even in the face of even more suffering? I don’t know how James did it. I had thought I needed to have my act together before I could enter his room, but James taught me that perfection and freedom from pain were fleeting. He taught me that when we are in the thick of life — in its messy, painful twists and turns — if we can respond to another’s pain with grace, we will find ourselves in the heart of God’s beloved community.

God, we ask that you lift the pain from those who suffer today. Give us the strength we need to offer your grace to each person we encounter. May we live into the beloved community that you are creating amid suffering and joy, illness and healing, dying and living. Amen.

First Saturday in Lent

March 7 | Joshua Yee

... “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Luke 12:13–15

We are taught as children to share and “play nice” with other kids, so why do sharing and caring seem to be such difficult concepts as we grow older?

Part of it may be due to the messages that caution us to live in fear and be wary of others. Expressions such as “us versus them,” “get ahead of the competition by any means possible,” or warnings like “be concerned for your own well-being” and “grow your retirement account at all costs” only perpetuate the self-seeking ideology that is so prevalent throughout our society.

We are often focused on building bigger and better storehouses to hold our ever-increasing material possessions that we ignore and forget our calling as people of faith to share. The Scriptures are clear that we ought to share what we have with others, particularly with the marginalized, poor and disenfranchised. We are called to act with grace and compassion, and to put on the clothes of righteousness, filling our lives with forgiveness, justice, mercy and love. When we embody generosity, respect and acceptance, we will steer away from building bigger barns for ourselves, and instead we will build a beloved community that is truly welcoming to all.

Giver of life, with gratitude we acknowledge your provision and blessings in our life. Help us to turn to you with humility and awe, as we discover new ways to experience the presence of the Spirit at work in the world. Through your continued grace and mercy, may we become a beloved community that is rich in love and compassion in all that we do and say. Amen.

A mosaic of the miracle of the fish and loaves by Pater Rupnik in Almudena Cathedral, Spain, asks us to reflect on how generous we are with sharing our resources with others.

Second Sunday in Lent

March 8 | Jacoba Vermaak

Jesus said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.” — Luke 14:12–13

“Vegetarian? Are you sure it is vegetarian?” he asked. “Yes, Dwight. Vegetarian,” I answered as I gave him a vegetarian “quick bag.”

We don’t call the bags we hand out on Monday mornings at the food pantry “homeless bags”; we call them “quick bags.” Language matters. Dwight may call the streets home. Most of the time people may treat him as invisible and sometimes even fear him when his behavior is erratic, but he deserves dignity and he finds it in the right to ask for a vegetarian quick bag at the pantry.

When we are out and about in the neighborhood and recognize one of our food pantry clients like Dwight, we greet them by name, and they greet us. We are, after all, neighbors. And joy comes when the pastor greets you by name out loud, stops and chats. A brief conversation speaks volumes, saying, “I matter. I am seen. I am more than my circumstances. I am a person.”

Dignity is the right to chat with my neighbors when our paths cross. Dignity is the right to be heard. Dignity is the right to have a vegetarian quick bag given when asked.

God of compassion, help us to accept in our heart of hearts that you love and affirm us as we are, so that we may turn around and treat others with the same unconditional compassion and acceptance.

Second Monday in Lent

March 9 | Jacoba Vermaak

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. — 1 John 4:12; 20

Our food pantry clients show up at dawn on Monday mornings. Rain or shine, holding a reusable grocery bag, canvas bag, plastic shopping bag or even a black trash bag, they wait in line to receive a number and hand off their bags. Then they wait until their numbers are called and they receive their bags back filled with groceries.

We put out coffee and tea along with chairs so that they can sit while they wait. Most who come are seniors who face a difficult choice each month: to pay for food, rent or medicine.

The air is alive with Korean, Tagalog, Spanish, Bengali, English and who knows what else. By now they know one another, sitting there together patiently every Monday morning. It's a strange feast for the ears in this otherwise anonymous urban landscape we call the City of Angels.

If someone came upon a blessing the previous week — say, a sack of potatoes — they will cook it and bring it to the Monday morning gathering. They pass the boiled potatoes around, sharing them over a cup of coffee. After all, they have been here since dawn. People are hungry. The Lord's Supper can take on many shapes and forms.

I glance at those gathered and it dawns on me that gathered before me is the beloved community of God. This is church — Monday morning church.

To the invisible God, help us to recognize your beloved community in our everyday comings and goings, so that we may see you visible and present in this world. Amen.

Second Tuesday in Lent

March 10 | Joshua Yee

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ... Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." — Luke 10:30–37

When I was a poor college student, my meals typically consisted of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and ramen noodles. I couldn't afford to eat out all the time, but there was a special afternoon when I took my girlfriend (now my wife) out to lunch. We picked up Hawaiian food and decided that it would be more romantic if we ate at a nearby park. As we drove up to a stoplight on the way to the park, we saw a homeless man on the side of the road. He was holding up a sign that read: "Hungry, anything will help."

I felt compelled to help, but my head — and stomach — told me drive away and pretend like I did not see him. I thought to myself, "Some other kind soul will stop to help him." As if my girlfriend could hear my thoughts, she turned to me and said, "I'm going to give one of our lunches to him." Without hesitation she opened her door and ran out, handing him one of our meals. As she stood outside having a conversation with this man, I sat in the car feeling anxious not only about the traffic that was piling up behind us, but also about how hard it would be for me to share my food with someone I knew, let alone a total stranger. It took me several minutes to sift through my emotions and thoughts, but then as I reflected on what just happened, I asked God for forgiveness for not stopping to help and only wanting to help if that meant giving him my leftovers. I thanked God for such an amazing girlfriend, who taught me a lesson on humility and generosity. Loving others can often come in simple acts of kindness and compassion.

Lord, open our eyes to see the things that we are blind to and help us become more aware of the needs around us. Lead us in being more generous with time, resources and compassion toward others. May we be instruments of your love. Amen.



Getty Images

A mosaic from the Church of the Miracle in Israel recalls how important the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish was to the early Christians. How can we better see this Lent that little is much when God is in it?

Second Wednesday in Lent

March 11 | Joshua Yee

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on." — Luke 21:1–4

When I was the youth director at a church in Southern California, we partnered with several other churches and a mission organization on annual mission trips to Maneadero, one of the poorest villages in Baja California. There we built several homes, supported a small orphanage, and worked with a local church to develop a youth camp center called Campo de Esperanza (Village of Hope). The adults from the village would go out to

work for 12 hours on the farmlands, while the young children were left to tend to the village. At the end of our week, the adults returned one evening and spent their money on food for all 60 of us. They bought chicken, tortillas, vegetables and fruit. They even invited us into their home, which was a light tarp hanging over the side of a fence. These were very "poor" people to us Americans. Yet it was they, not we, who seemed to live with more joy, compassion, generosity and hospitality. Even though they had very little to spare, they gave out of their own poverty to show us gratitude for what we did that week.

God of grace, help us to be more Christlike in our thoughts, words and actions. Humble our minds and our hearts as we learn how to love others with pure hearts. We ask this in the name of the Holy One. Amen.

Second Thursday in Lent

March 12 | Amanda Adams Riley

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. — Psalm 23:1-3

Our church advertises “All Are Welcome,” and we get everyone. We regularly welcome individuals who are intoxicated or experiencing psychosis. This, of course, means that we have to be good at welcoming everyone, no matter what state they are in when entering our church.

We have learned through intentional training that one of the best things we can offer anyone who enters, besides words of welcome, is an opportunity to be grounded. This looks like different things to different people. Sometimes

it is as simple as an offer to sit down or have a cup of water. Other times it looks like spending time together in observation of our surroundings. The light in the space, the familiar or unfamiliar faces around us, the feeling of the air. All of these observations of our physical world help get us out of our heads and into the present moment. When we practice welcome — and grounding — we find ourselves better able to connect with God and one another.

God who leads us and refreshes us, grant to us the space to experience your created world and better discern our role in your Creation. Amen.

Getty Images



Second Friday in Lent

March 13 | Amanda Adams Riley

In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. — John 1:4–5

Each week, as part of our liturgy we light a small candle enclosed in a glass candleholder and say, “We light this light as a reminder of God’s light in the world, the divine spark in everyone we meet and the light that is present here. We unpack the light, the light of Christ, the light that shines in the darkness and is not overcome, and the light that we see as we look around the circle, into each other’s eyes, and see the spark of the divine in all people.”

It’s a simple ritual, and the congregation really enjoys looking at one another, making eye contact and smiling. At the end of our service, we extinguish the candle. One Sunday, the light burned out before our service had ended. A young man noticed that the light was out and made sure I knew to relight it. For him, that light needed to stay lit, because it was a reminder to all of God’s persistence in our world and in our lives. And so, we relit the candle.

God of Light, help us remember that you are the source of unrelenting light as we go in the world to love and to serve you. Amen.

Second Saturday in Lent

March 14 | Sunny Kang

Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. — Matthew 18:5

I was a stranger. I had just come to the U.S. from Korea and I did not speak a word of English. The trauma of the first day of school as a new immigrant child is as vivid today as it was 50 years ago.

I stood frozen in the front of the classroom with 30 pairs of strange blue eyes staring at the first foreign kid to come to that school. I was saved by a boy in my class named John who guided me to a seat next to him and helped me with the first-day activities.

It was at lunch when John really took care of me. I did not have a lunch ticket because my father was not aware that he had to make arrangements for lunches at the cafeteria. John argued with the lunchroom monitor that since I was new to the school, I should be allowed to eat, even without a ticket. Then he got me a tray and led me down the line. I just took whatever John took. After all, he was a friend.

Even as an 11-year-old, John knew what it meant to welcome a stranger. I never forgot how safe I felt when he helped me through the day. Remembering John’s kindness, I befriended every new kid who came to school and made sure they had at least one friend. Even though John and I were from different backgrounds, we remained good friends until we graduated from high school.

God of strangers and outsiders, help us to welcome all with open arms and loving hearts. Amen.

A mosaic cross found in a Byzantine basilica in the Jordan asks us to ponder how Christ died to save all — not a certain group or a select few. This Lent, how can we expand our vision of inclusivity?

Third Sunday in Lent

March 15 | Sunny Kang

Jesus had compassion ... [and] said, “You give them something to eat.” — Matthew 14:14, 16

Growing up in Korea, I always looked forward to boxes of oranges that arrived every fall from my grandfather. At the time I did not know their significance, but I now refer to them as “Matthew 25 oranges.”

After escaping from North Korea in 1946, my grandfather settled in the southern Korean island of Jeju as a tentmaking lay pastor ministering to poor war refugees. However, he found that people were so worried about finding enough food to feed their children that they did not have energy to think about eternal life. Remembering Matthew 25 and how feeding the poor was feeding Jesus, my grandfather looked for ways to help people achieve sustainable security. He spent the next 10 years developing a new breed of oranges and other citrus fruits to grow on the island. These were the first citrus fruits grown on the Korean peninsula. He then shared his knowledge with other refugees who were struggling against poverty on the island.

With a new crop, the poor refugee community was transformed. Those who had worried about surviving just for today had hope for tomorrow.

By creating a new way for people to take care of their families, my grandfather enabled people to experience God’s generous provisions for themselves. By meeting people’s need, my grandfather’s church improved people’s lives and made the community a better place for its neighbors.

God of generosity and abundance, you have met our every need. However, while we may be satisfied, some of our neighbors and friends do not have enough. Be merciful and give us soft and gentle hearts so that, just like Jesus, we may be moved to compassionate actions when we see someone struggling with poverty. Amen.

Third Monday in Lent

March 16 | Sunny Kang

Religion that is pure ... is this: to take care for orphans and widows in their distress. — James 1:27

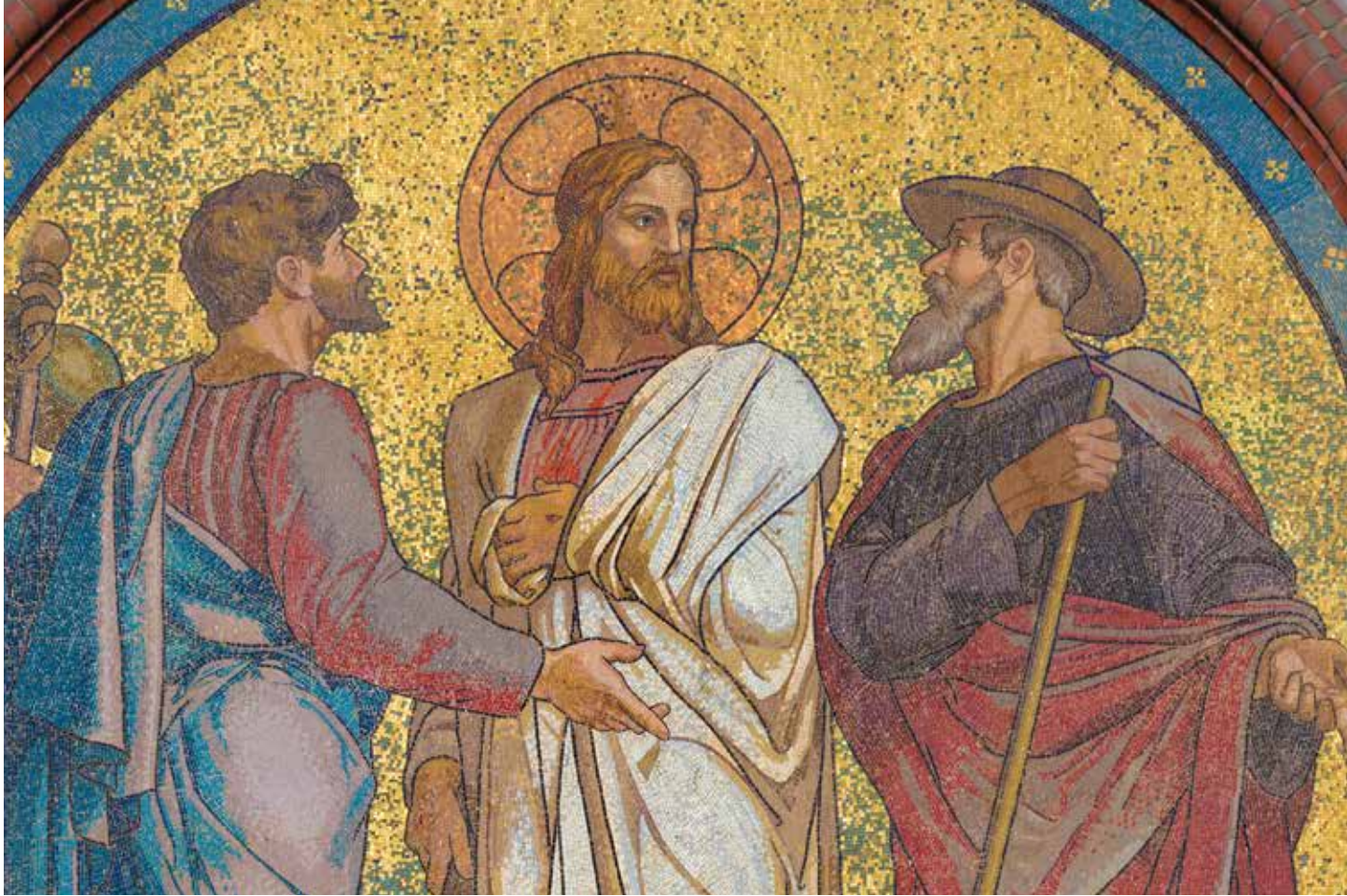
Several years ago, I met a man from China whose story humbled and challenged me. As a poor young man in search of a fortune, Mr. Mi moved to Urumqi, a Free Enterprise Zone in northwest China. He borrowed from anyone who would lend him money and bought a broken-down jalopy of a truck to start a business transporting construction materials. Even after he became successful, he never forgot how hunger felt.

About 25 years ago, Urumqi city leaders came to Mr. Mi asking for a donation to build a shelter for orphaned children living on the streets. Rather than giving money, he adopted all of them. He believed that children needed more than a shelter — they needed a family. In his backyard, he built an apartment building to provide a home for them, including “aunties” to take care of the younger ones; a fully staffed hospital with doctors, dentists and nurses for their health-care needs; and a K-12 school to ensure that they had education. He even built a job training center for older teens and young adults. Over the next 10 years, he adopted more than 500 children, and during that time no child was homeless in Urumqi.

Even though Mr. Mi identifies as a Muslim, I am certain he understands Jesus’ words in Matthew 25. Lord, when did we see you?

God of orphans and widows, open our eyes so that we may see that whenever we care for someone in need, we are tending to you. O Jesus, give us faith that will enable us to love our neighbors as you have loved us. Amen.

Life is not meant to travel alone. When two or more are gathered, Christ is present. How can you enlarge the circle of your beloved community? Here, a mosaic of Jesus with the disciples on the road to Emmaus from the Emmauskirche in Berlin.



Getty Images

Third Tuesday in Lent

March 17 | Emmanuel G. Orendain

They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem. — Luke 24:32–33

Imagine a day that you thought would never come. Imagine a person you'd meet that you thought you would never see again. Imagine a time when all things become possible just because God made it so.

I stepped out of the plane that flew me across the Pacific from the Philippines into Los Angeles International Airport. I was coming to the U.S. as an immigrant. My visa was approved in 1998, but I wasn't able to leave for the U.S. until 2002. I had been married to my American wife for close to nine years. At that time our three daughters were 9, 6 and 3.

For some reason, my visa application would always be denied. Thus, my family shuttled back and forth for years just so we could be together. Finally, with some intervention, my visa was approved. Our family would

finally be united.

Imagine my heart when I saw my wife and daughters waiting for me at the airport. I embraced them all for the longest time. I was so happy. I couldn't hold back my tears.

Two friends walking toward Emmaus thought all was lost. They talked about the great things they thought would happen because of Jesus. But not anymore. Jesus was dead. They heard rumors about him being alive, but they just couldn't believe it. And then it happened. Jesus walked alongside them and later joined them to break bread. In the breaking of the bread, their eyes were opened. It was Jesus. They were reunited. They ran back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples the good news.

There is great joy in families being reunited. There is so much good happening when dreams get a second chance. Let's be agents of this joy and goodness.

Lord of new beginnings, thank you for allowing us to experience the joy of being given the chance to enjoy family and friends. Challenge us to be participants in making these experiences possible for all. Amen.



Getty Images

A detail of Jesus in the Deësis mosaic in Istanbul, Turkey. What does Christ look like in your beloved community?

Third Wednesday in Lent

March 18 | Emmanuel G. Orendain

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” — Matthew 25:37–40

Mr. M, an immigrant from the Middle East, came to our church as a seeker. After attending our services, he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. But Mr. M had a backpack that he carried everywhere. It made some members uncomfortable as they wondered what was in the bulky sack.

A few weeks after the San Bernardino terrorist shooting, members became even more wary of Mr. M’s backpack. During one Sunday school session, Mr. M put his backpack on the table. Everyone was anxious as he

unzipped it. To their surprise — and relief — Mr. M pulled out the biggest Bible one had ever seen. It was in his language and he flipped the pages from right to left. It had beautiful markings on the leather cover. Mr. M held the Bible dearly.

Mr. M has been a member of the church for five years now. He sings in the choir, attends a men’s group, participates in prayer meetings and attends Sunday school.

We thought he was the stranger when he first came to the church. But it turns out we were the strangers — the strangers to God’s love and grace. We were suspicious of Mr. M’s backpack and thought the worst. Now we know better to love and trust God more. No more are we strangers of God’s kingdom. We are citizens, part of God’s beloved community.

Creator God, giver of all that we need, grant us an abundance of generosity to be able to give and to care. May our lives be examples of the life of Jesus Christ as he gave his life so that all may live. Amen.

Third Thursday in Lent

March 19 | Emmanuel G. Orendain

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. — Luke 14:13–14

One day a homeless man came and sat in the back pew. His appearance was not offensive, but he was definitely unkempt. He worshiped quietly — almost sleeping — one of our deacons noticed. He came again the next Sunday, and three more Sundays after that. Quietly in and quietly out. He did not bother anyone. When a new members' class was announced, he signed up. His name was Cliff. To our surprise, he came early to the class and had a notebook. He also trimmed his long beard and had a change of clothes. He finished the four-week class and became a member in December 2010.

He was active, attending Sunday school classes and church events. It was in one such class that the question was asked, "From where you are in the pew, what do you see?"

Cliff answered, "I see myself in the praise team, playing the tuba."

The problem was that there were no tubas in the praise team. There wasn't even music available for a tuba. No problem. The church set to work to raise funds to buy a tuba for Cliff and the praise team leader would write the music for that tuba. Sadly, Cliff never got to play his tuba. He said goodbye to us the week we were to buy it. He said he had a permanent address now. His sister asked him to stay with her in Ohio. That was 2013. We have not seen him or heard from him since. We miss Cliff. When he had no permanent address, he made his home in our hearts. More than the church welcoming him, he welcomed us into his life.

Dear God, give us the boldness to risk our comfortable lives as we open our churches, and even our homes, to those we think will bring us discomfort. Let us know that this is the only way we can make our church truly a beloved community. Amen.

Third Friday in Lent

March 20 | Linda L. Culbertson

... to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke
... Is it not to share your bread with the hungry? — Isaiah 58:6a; 7a

I first noticed him in the empty lot where a diner had once been. The lot had been enclosed with a chain-link fence. I suspect that he felt safe within the confines of that space. He had set up a tent and stored a shopping cart with his possessions next to it. There was an old folding chair just outside the entrance to the tent. I could hear him talking loudly and at times shouting from where I stood on the sidewalk. He seemed very agitated and distressed but didn't notice me that day.

A lunch meeting had been held at my office. There were sandwiches, cookies and fruit that hadn't been consumed, so I decided to make a few meal bags with some bottles of water and take them to him — the one living in the fenced-in lot.

When I arrived with bags, I shouted, "Hey, friend, are you hungry? Would you like some food?"

He didn't respond to me at first. The "voices" that haunted him were active. I persisted and kept repeating, "Friend, are you hungry?"

Eventually he approached and I asked him his name and told him mine. I handed Michael the bags of food. Michael lifted his hands and looked up and said, "Thank you, God, for providing for me this day. This makes up for all the other days when others have yelled at me and have been mean to me."

Then Michael thanked me and asked if I would eat with him. We feasted together that day and shared our stories.

Help us, O God, to see those who are "fenced-off" and dehumanized — those who some others think are only worthy of hate. We pray for those oppressed and in despair. Minister to them by your Spirit and by us. Teach us to love as you have loved us. Amen.

Third Saturday in Lent

March 21 | Amanda Adams Riley

Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. — Deuteronomy 31:6

Our local Methodist church was hosting a family who was homeless. I offered to take the overnight shift, which meant sleeping on a cot in the pastor's office. Early in the morning, I woke up to loud bangs. Since our community loves fireworks, I assured myself that the noise was from fireworks and I tried falling back asleep. Sleep was difficult because shortly after the bangs came the helicopters. It was not fireworks. There had been a shooting. Still unable to sleep, I checked my phone and learned that my neighborhood was not the only one in our nation that experienced gun violence. The headlines read that Dayton, Ohio, had joined El Paso, Texas, on the list of mass shootings.

As it happens after mass shootings, rhetoric around mental illness and gun violence surfaced. A few days later I found myself in a conversation with two church members, both of whom are advocates for those with mental illness. They spoke candidly about that community and how unsafe they all feel because of the language used in the media. They talked about how they and those they work with fear violence as a result of the misleading connections made between those with mental illnesses and increases in gun violence. Fear begets fear.

God of all, who goes with us and who will never fail or forsake us, grant us strength in the face of fear, wisdom to seek understanding and clarity of vision to see the impact our beliefs and words have in your world. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 22 | Harold E. Kidd

Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. — Joshua 1:6

In 2017, our church leadership was challenged with how to minister to the youth being underserved in the Inglewood, California, community. How could we be used by God in helping to prepare the present generation to succeed?

In our research, we discovered that many of our youth found themselves in a modern-day urban wilderness characterized by high rates of divorce, single-parent homes, gang recruitment, access to drugs, gun violence, sexual promiscuity and failing public education systems. With the support of Pacific Presbytery through its Urban Church Redevelopment Fund, our church launched the Joshua Initiative. The initiative took its name from the historical narrative of the Exodus: children born in the wilderness and led into the promised land under the leadership of Joshua.

Now in its third year, the Joshua Initiative offers programs that include mentoring, classes in life skills such as cooking and sewing, math tutoring and even video editing. The Joshua Initiative also launched partnerships with South L.A. Robotics, offering classes in robotics. Church members even volunteer in local classrooms, becoming involved with children and their families in our church and community.

Lord, grant us the courage, passion and vision to reach beyond the walls of our comfort zones to reach those needing to experience the love and nurture of community. Amen.

Fourth Monday in Lent

March 23 | Harold E. Kidd

I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who lived by the river Chebar. And I sat there among them, stunned, for seven days. — Ezekiel 3:15

Ezekiel, God’s prophet, is carried away by the Spirit and placed among the exiles at Tel-abib in Babylon. This is in order to sensitize the prophet to the plight of God’s people. Sensitivity and compassion to the plight of any people are needed before ministry can be born. Identifying with others is the byproduct of sitting with them and learning from them through hearing their stories.

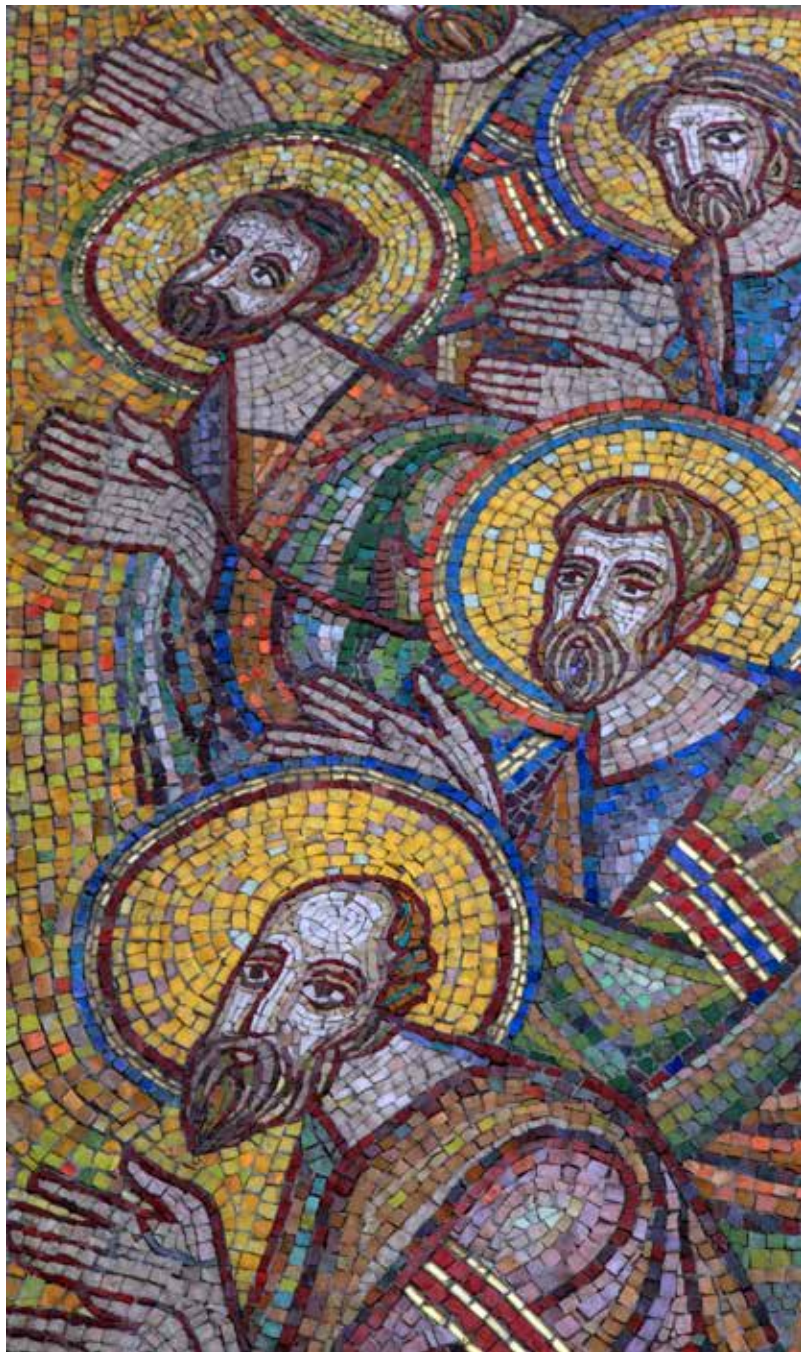
There are a number of exiles in our nation today — the poor, the incarcerated, the aged, the immigrants coming to our borders seeking safety, and so many others. Here in California, skyrocketing rents have created many displaced families.

In 2017, congregations in Inglewood, California, came together to fight for rent control. We held town hall meetings to hear the testimony of residents being unfairly evicted and the victims of price gouging by landlords. We heard, talked and prayed with those being displaced. We knocked on doors in our community to register people to vote. We held ecumenical worship services to lift up the housing plight of many people. We even did phone banking, encouraging residents to vote “yes” for a 2018 statewide ballot initiative that would expand local governments’ authority to enact rent control on residential properties.

While that initiative failed, we were not deterred, as 60% of those living in Inglewood who voted were in favor of it. We had built solidarity. A beloved community was birthed.

Lord, continue to remind us that we are bound together in this beautiful fabric of a shared humanity. Teach us how to be suffering servants who are willing to take risks in sitting with others whose plight is difficult and whose pain is too heavy to bear alone. And in our sitting, may we find the strength to stand together, speaking truth to power, in order that your justice and mercy might prevail. Amen.

Getty Images



A detail of the apostles mosaic found in Ukraine. Who would be pictured as today’s saints in your beloved community who are making a difference?

Fourth Tuesday in Lent

March 24 | Harold E. Kidd

Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. — Mark 2:3

When the church is filled with the presence of Christ, miracles happen! For the church has not been called to be a museum, mausoleum or country club, but a hospital where the sick can find wholeness in the midst of their brokenness. A gathering place blessed with the healing presence of Christ where we can experience fellowship and community, where the heavy laden can find their burdens lifted, where the lonely and marginalized can worship in a welcoming community, and a broken humanity may experience healing.

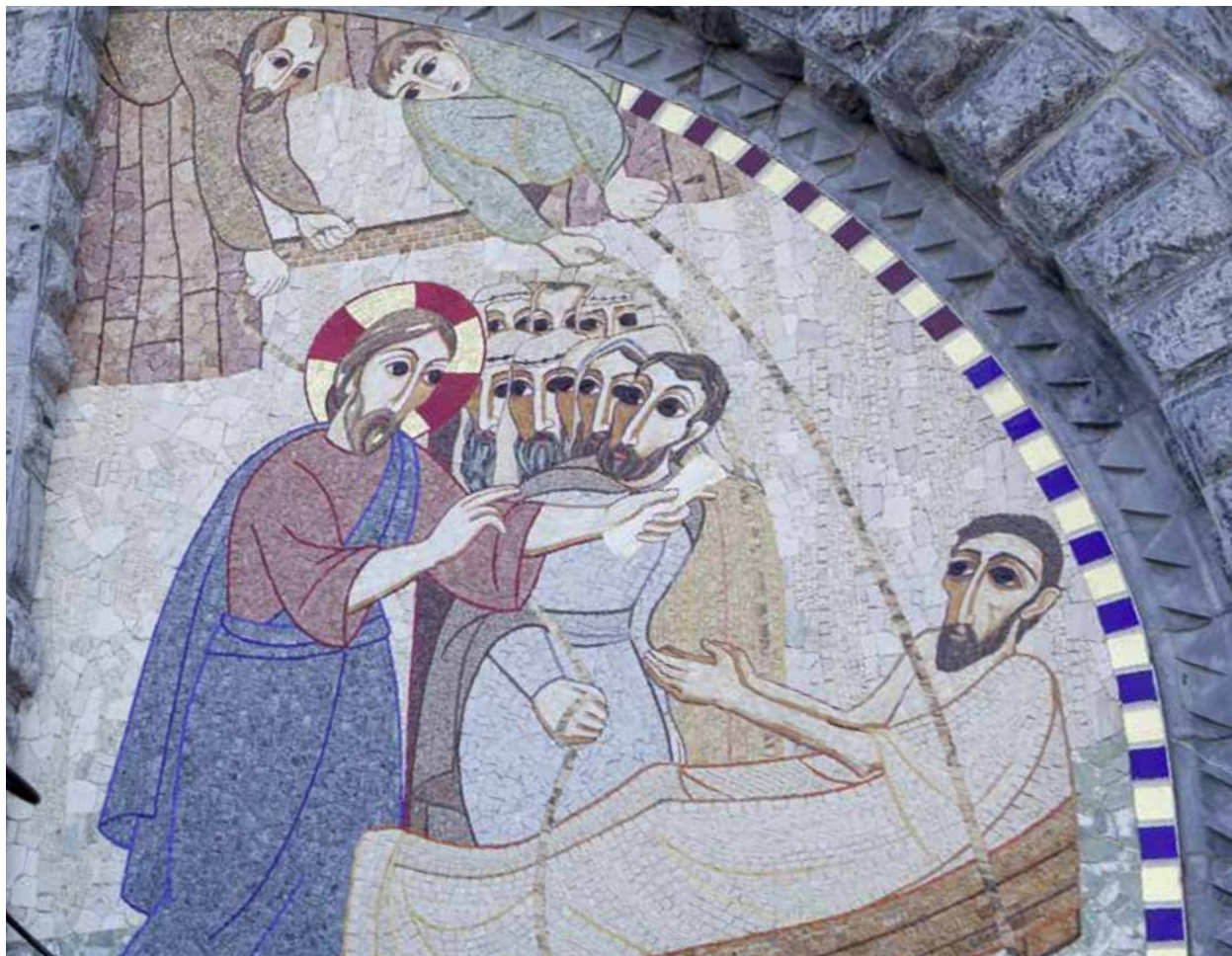
Four friends came carrying a paralytic on a mat, to present him to Jesus for healing. He was too weak to get there on his own. So, they brought him. And when they could not find a way to get him in the door, they went up on the mud-thatched roof, broke up the roof tiles and lowered him into

the presence of the Lord. That's what loving friends do — they go out of their way, out of compassion, to bring others in need to the Lord.

Several years ago, one of our members who suffered with lupus for more than two decades started an outreach ministry named The Center for Lupus Care. The center operates with a “mission to educate everyone, especially the underserved, about lupus” and provides resources to families living with lupus. Through the center outreach ministry, countless families have been helped. Some have even joined the church. But more importantly, the center has become a community of friends offering support to each other through their faith in Christ, prayers and life experiences in living with lupus.

Dear Lord, our Great Physician, guide us in discovering how we might participate with you in the healing of those who suffer from some form of physical, mental or spiritual illness. Teach us how to become loving friends to those who are too weak to find resources on their own and who are in need of advocates to journey with them. Amen.

Getty Images



Fourth Wednesday in Lent

March 25 | Liz Leavitt

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. — Psalm 139:1–3

Newcomers to our congregation are often surprised to learn that we take attendance. Each week, one of our faithful elders works covertly on his checklist from the choir loft as I offer our opening welcome. Scanning the list each Monday morning, I find myself pausing mostly on the empty boxes, allowing the absences to draw me to pastoral reflection. Those who are ill in body or mind; those who are away for work, play or deployment; those who have died recently enough that to remove their names would seem an affront — for each, I offer a quick prayer. I keep an eye out, too, for unexplained absences, knowing that some of my most meaningful spiritual conversations begin with “I haven’t seen you for a while.”

When I consider the psalmist’s vision — of a God who notes our comings and goings — I wonder how we are called to practice such loving attention to our neighbors. To me, it seems, the gap between the world as it is, and as it should be, often exists in the absences: in noticing those who aren’t with us because they haven’t been invited, weren’t welcome or couldn’t access the space where we meet. If the gospel is about a new kind of belonging to God’s body, then a witness to that vision must be both a community that knows and remembers its own, marks and mourns those who are absent, and hopes for the day when all are present and lovingly accounted for.

Welcoming God, who knows our comings and goings, you assure us that we belong to you. Help us to be generous with that spirit of gracious attention, that we might welcome all your people. Amen.

A mosaic on the facade of the Rosary Basilica in Lourdes, France, shows friends helping their friend receive healing from Jesus. What can you do this week to bring someone the healing they need?

Fourth Thursday in Lent

March 26 | Liz Leavitt

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. — 1 Corinthians 13:12

I sat next to Kevin in the church basement, which was open that day as a drop-in community center, and asked him how things were going.

“OK, I guess,” he said with his typical hesitancy.

I asked about his new day program, a placement his caretakers had fought to secure in a center for adults with intellectual disabilities.

“Actually, I don’t like it that much,” he mumbled. I felt myself growing impatient. So much work had gone into finding that opening. I asked him why not.

“Because the work they have us do ... it’s not really real, is it?” he said.

He was right. The phones to answer, the making of change, the field trips — they were all preparations for a job he would likely never have. I was humbled. I had been too quick to feel satisfied with my efforts, to imagine the work of being beloved community for Kevin as a task completed rather than the ongoing work of transforming the world.

If we’re lucky, we see glimpses of it in church: a sense of meaning and belonging, authentic relationship and thriving for everyone. We work for it in all places — justice, dignity and love for all. But so often we fall short, our efforts too meager and too brief. In Lent and always, we repent of those shortcomings, trusting that the mercy of God is “really real” and that someday we will be known completely and welcomed despite our failings. One day, we will take our place in that great heavenly chorus where all can join in the work of praise. And we will give thanks.

God of mercy, help us to see ourselves completely. Strengthen us for the long night of work ahead. Forgive us for the times we fail to embody your ministry of justice and welcome. Assure us of your unending love, expressed through your presence with us in the person of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Fourth Friday in Lent

March 27 | Bethany McKinney Fox

Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ... he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — he said to the paralytic — "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them ... — Mark 2:3–12

A good friend of mine is an ordained minister who has cerebral palsy, and he uses a power scooter to get around. He has a tremendous mind and heart for ministry. When he was doing his pastoral internship, a number of folks in the congregation had a difficult time with his needing to preach from a seated position, instead of standing at the pulpit. The whole time he worked at the internship, each time he'd preach, there would be some grumbling that he was sitting to do it.

When I think of my friend's experience, I think about this Scripture, and how a group of folks carrying a man on his mat realized that there was a barrier in getting to Jesus, so they cut a hole in a perfectly good roof in order to make sure the man they knew could get to Jesus. And how did Jesus respond? He commended their faith. Destroying a barrier between people and Jesus, even if it was something (like a sturdy roof) that had been helpful at other times, was something Jesus commended.

Being locked into a rule that a preacher needs to stand while preaching (or any other rule that excludes people from sharing their God-given gifts) creates a barrier that can keep people from encountering Jesus. In this text, we notice Jesus celebrating that barrier's removal.

God, we thank you that you have gifted all people and desire for them to use those gifts. We ask that where there are systems and barriers that exclude some people, particularly people with disabilities, from being able to share those gifts, that you would give us imaginations for a truly accessible community where everyone's gifts are received and all can be blessed by the gifts of others. Amen.



Fourth Saturday in Lent

March 28 | Bethany McKinney Fox

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. — 1 Corinthians 12:4–7

Years ago, I remember going to church with one of my close friends who has Down syndrome. She had grown up going to church, loved Jesus deeply and connected well with the rhythms of the service — though admittedly, she did tend to nod off during lengthy sermons. It would make me sad and angry when people would patronize or



Getty Images

A mosaic on the ceiling of the Galla Placidia mausoleum in Ravenna, Italy, shows Christ as the Good Shepherd. How have you felt Christ's tender care for you during this season of Lent? How have you shared that care with others?

underestimate her because of her disability, because getting to know her faith and praying with her changed my life.

She once prayed asking Jesus to wipe her face with kindness, and she often tells Jesus that she loves him from the bottom of her speechless heart. Her belief in Jesus' fierce love for her has been stronger than anyone's I have known, and her level of faith has challenged and shaped my faith as well. My friend now has dementia, something that happens for people with Down syndrome at a much younger age. She doesn't express herself in the same ways she once did. But I know she is still filled with the Spirit and God continues to

activate her gifts even as they are taking a new shape in this new season.

Generous God, thank you for the abundant gifts you give to your people. Help us be more aware of the ways your Spirit is moving in us, and in the people around us — especially people who have often been considered merely objects of ministry or recipients of our help. Allow us to perceive ourselves and other people as you perceive us, noticing and being grateful for the wide and beautiful ways you activate every single one of us to live as your people in the world. Amen.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 29 | Rae Chen Huang

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. — Mark 10:17–22

The good news that Jesus preaches is not just about personal salvation, nor is it merely a call to discipleship. It's a call to an economic vision that is revolutionary.

The reason that millions over the centuries followed a radical named Jesus was not because it was easy, but because his vision was transformative for the people who followed him. His vision is still necessary today.

We live in the richest nation in the world, yet 64 million make less than \$15 an hour and 32 million lack health insurance. Basic needs like water, health care and living wages are being attacked and those attacks are further hurting the poor. No matter who we are, all of us are feeling these effects of disparity.

God created a world where we have sufficient resources to protect the environment and ensure dignified lives for everyone. The problem is a matter of priorities, as wealth is being accumulated on the backs of the poor and amassed through the exploitation of the earth and God's creatures.

How do we inherit eternal life? How do we create the beloved community? We live into a vision where we share our riches and our wealth and make sure that all have enough. And there, we will find life everlasting; not only for the chosen few, but so that all may live and have life abundantly.

God who has made enough, thank you for the divine wealth that is this earth, its people and its creatures. Help us to imagine, preserve and co-create a world where there is enough for everyone. Amen.

Getty Images



Fifth Monday in Lent

March 30 | Peter Dunn

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. — 1 Peter 2:24

My storyteller inhabited a thin and bony frame, with painful muscle strains all over his neck and arms from living with multiple sclerosis for the past 10 years. It was obvious he loved sharing every strained word, entrusting me with his biography. Each new vignette of what it was like to grow up in one of the most notorious gang neighborhoods in America was more captivating than the last.

Willie was the founding member of Watts Powerhouse Church in Los Angeles. His joyful attitude, despite the circumstances, is one of the clearest examples of what the transformative work of the Holy Spirit can do in a person's life. As a man, he was literally the walking wounded, and yet he woke up every Sunday morning ready to worship with his whole body. A few triumphant handclaps from Willie in a worship service and we all knew God was close.

He couldn't cover up his wounds, even if he wanted to, and during the times when the pain was so great he could no longer take care of himself, people in the community considered it a privilege to give back to him in a small way what he gave in such large helpings. Willie's strength in weakness blessed an entire community and led many closer to Jesus.

Lord Jesus, we come to you with our wounds. You know us and love us for who we truly are. Empower us to go to those in our care and let them touch our scars. Help us to celebrate the cracks in our lives, understanding they are the places where your grace is most transmitted from one human soul to another. Amen.

A detail of the mosaic on the facade of the Rosary Basilica in Lourdes, France, shows Jesus with his disciples. They are eager to learn, but how eager are they to follow? Where are you in your commitment to follow Christ to the cross?

Fifth Tuesday in Lent

March 31 | Peter Dunn

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." — John 8:31–32

In his book "The Paradox of Choice," psychologist Barry Schwartz takes aim at a central tenet of western societies: freedom of choice. In Schwartz's estimation, choice has made us not freer but more paralyzed, not happier but more dissatisfied. Anyone who has found themselves paralyzed by having to choose just one of the 175 salad dressings at the supermarket may relate. Our society values freedom and it seeks to maximize freedom by maximizing choice.

What all of these options do is set our expectations so high, no one individual choice could ever satisfy them, leaving millions with the feeling "I have everything I could ever need, so why do I feel so unhappy?" This dogma has made its way into every aspect of western industrialized society, and Schwartz argues that it is responsible for the dramatic increase in depression and suicide over the past decade.

What if a beloved community of people decided to go in a different direction? Jesus teaches us that freedom comes from knowledge of the truth. So how do we discover the true way to live in a culture that seduces us into thinking that we are entitled to endless options? Dr. Cornel West, a professor at Harvard University and author of several books, including "Race Matters," writes: "The condition of truth is to allow suffering to speak." What can we learn today by listening to the voices of those who are hurting all around us? What truths about living a meaningful life might they reveal? Jesus, on many occasions, took the time to hear the cries of the suffering.

God of hope, we pause and breathe deeply, praising you that life is a gift that we get to unpack each day. Help us to be present to you and discover just how wonderful this journey is. Amen.

Fifth Wednesday in Lent

April 1 | Victoria Barner

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? — 1 John 3:17

One morning, I was waiting for a green light. I looked to my right and saw a very serious-looking African American woman walking toward the crosswalk. God spoke to my heart and said, "Give her \$20." I took \$5 from my wallet, as it was the first bill I saw in my wallet, and waved it to the woman. She ignored me. I sighed. I went to work and forgot all about her.

On my way home, I decided to buy some groceries when I saw the same woman walking toward where I was going. I parked my car, reached down to my purse and, this time, took out a \$20 bill. I got out of my car and hurriedly walked toward the woman.

"The Lord told me to give this to you," I said.

The woman quietly took the money and continued walking. I was expecting her to say, "Thank you!" or at least show an attitude of gratitude, but she just took the money without saying anything. Strangely, I was not upset. I was just grateful that God gave me another chance to be present for this woman. I never saw that woman again, although I take the same route every morning on my way to work and home.

God, provider for the helpless, help me to have a heart like yours that loves the poor and the helpless. Amen.

Fifth Thursday in Lent

April 2 | Victoria Barner

Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. — Matthew 5:42

It was raining and I needed to put gas in my tank before I went to work. As I was putting the nozzle back in its place, a woman approached me and asked, "Could you please take me to my motel, which is not very far from here? I don't have a car."

I had never been in this situation before. I was nervous to allow a stranger into my car and I heard myself saying, "I have to go to work. I don't want to be late." When she said the motel was close, I reluctantly said, "All right, hop in."

Lord, please protect me as I help this woman.

I took her to her motel, and she thanked me profusely. I pulled away in the pouring rain with so many emotions, among them thankfulness that I did not allow my concerns for my personal safety to prevent me from helping this woman.

All I could think of was that the Lord wanted me to help this woman by providing her a ride and that those who look like they are "throwaways" in our society need a friend to get them home, even if home is a temporary motel.

Dear Lord, when you want me to help a beloved, help me to completely trust you, for you will guide and protect and provide all I need to be a friend to the stranger. Amen.

A mosaic in St. Barnabas Church, London, shows Jesus instructing Peter to "feed my sheep." How have you heeded those instructions to feed and tend God's beloved community?

Fifth Friday in Lent

April 3 | Victoria Barner

For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish. — Mark 14:7

My husband and I were going somewhere in our old car. We were about 15 feet away from a bus stop when I saw a woman with three kids in tow. One was a toddler. Suddenly, it started to rain hard and the family of three ran toward a bus stop that had no roof.

“They’ll get wet,” I told my husband.

Without a word, my husband stopped the car by the curb. Both of us called to the mother in our broken Spanish.

The mother understood us and hurriedly entered our car with her kids. Now what? The mother could not speak English and our Spanish was very poor. I tried recollecting what little Spanish I learned in high school. I tried my best to ask her where she was going, but I realized I was using the wrong terms. We both laughed and, amazingly, the woman understood me. She gave us directions of whether to turn right or left or go straight. Finally, we reached her destination — home was the “poor” part of the community. After mumbling “gracias,” the family got out of the car and ran toward their home. My husband and I continued on our way in quiet, listening only to the rain. Finally, my husband spoke: “There are so many of them. We don’t even have to look for them. We just need to be willing to help.”

Dear Lord, please help us to intentionally look for people we can help. Amen.

Getty Images





Getty Images

Fifth Saturday in Lent

April 4 | Neema Cyrus-Franklin

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. ... You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

— Psalm 118:26, 28–29

When I was a child, the elders in my home congregation would recite Psalm 118 seemingly every Sunday. As a “preacher’s kid,” I often overheard the hardships faced by those in our church as my parents prayed on their behalf. There were countless struggles and challenges: untreated mental illnesses, homelessness after losing a job, discrimination at school and the workplace, wrongful incarcerations and years of legal bills, to name a few. I knew those in the congregation were living through a nightmare and I couldn’t understand why or how they could extol the words of the psalmist amid such seemingly insurmountable odds. Years later, I understood this lesson from my youth.

At times, our world seems to spin out of our control; out of our ability to will a favorable outcome. When I found myself in difficult circumstances as an adult, I reflected on the lessons from my childhood. I remembered that during these moments, I didn’t have to suffer in silence.

During the prayers of the people at church, I gave my worries and situation over to God. We stood together, cried together and praised together the God who created us to be more than conquerors. Life’s difficult circumstances provided for me and my congregation an invitation to meet with God front and center — together. It was an invitation not to journey alone, an invitation to an ongoing, dynamic experience of humanity connecting with God, an invitation to the beloved community.

Dear Lord, there are times when I feel so alone and troubled. Light my path and guide my feet, so that I may come to know and experience your loving grace through your beloved community. Amen.

Palm/Passion Sunday

April 5 | Amanda Adams Riley

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith. — Romans 12:6

Our church meets in a garden in downtown San Pedro, California. Worshipers come from a variety of backgrounds, from white-collar working adults, retirees and families to the unhoused, food insecure and those with mental illness. Our garden, which grows primarily produce and herbs, is run and maintained by volunteers.

One Friday, Jonny walked in, pointed to the short palm tree by the front fence and said, “I planted that. His name is Daddy.”

I looked at the palm and replied, “Its branches need to be trimmed.”

Jonny retrieved a saw and got to work. Jonny is a schizophrenic, and he has been housed and unhoused, addicted and now sober. Not five minutes later, Charles walked in, chatting about what a good job he had had that morning, working on the electrical wiring for a local restaurant. The next thing I knew, Charles was breaking down the palm branches and hauling them to the back of the garden. Charles is Native American and has been unhoused as long as I have known him. Like Jonny, Charles has a mental illness. Yet they come to the garden and find solace. They find purpose. They find community. They come to the garden to tend to Daddy the palm tree, taking pride in its healthy fronds. And, as they do, they smile, realizing they both play a part in nurturing something so beautiful.

Gift-giving God, help our eyes to be open to look beyond labels, so that we may see the beloved child of God you have put in front of us. Amen.

Jesus' triumphal entry captured in a mosaic in St. George Greek Orthodox Church, Jordan. Picture yourself in the crowd. Will your cheers turn to jeers as this Holy Week progresses?

Monday of Holy Week

April 6 | Grace H. Park

... he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” — Luke 10:29

We are so familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan. A man who would be considered an enemy made himself a neighbor with the realization that he had a responsibility to another human being. So often we think that our neighbor will be someone who looks like us, but perhaps that is not the case, nor should it be.

What does God look like? Would we recognize God if we saw God?

We have to confront the possibility that God has appeared into our life in ways, shapes and forms that we did not expect, or perhaps did not see. Our eyes and hearts must always be open to the possibility of what we can do for someone else.

Helen Keller, in her great wisdom, said, “Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained.”

We have to have the courage and bravery to challenge ourselves with the real questions of life: Have I truly welcomed my neighbor into my heart? And who really is my neighbor?

Amazing God of all people, help me to open my heart to those who may or may not look like me, act like me or think like me. Help me to look for my neighbor, today and always. Amen.

Tuesday of Holy Week

April 7 | Grace H. Park

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. — Leviticus 19:34

Jesus' first miracle was one of hospitality, providing more wine at a wedding to ensure the guests had plenty. In this incredible act, Jesus was following the Middle Eastern understanding of the concept of welcome and providing for others.

Years before Jesus walked on this earth, God commanded the Israelites as recorded in the book of Leviticus to open their hearts and homes to others, to strangers in their midst, to provide for and welcome them. Why did God ask them to do this? Was it to remind them of their beginnings, to remind them to rely on God for provision as they provided for others? Perhaps. But perhaps it was to remind them that God has room at the table for everyone. No one is to be a stranger — everyone has a place with God.

Fred Rogers once said, "Discovering the truth about ourselves is a lifetime's work, but it's worth the effort." The Lenten season, especially Holy Week, is the time to look inward and upward, to discover more of who we are in the light of God's love and be drawn closer to God through this time.

Loving and welcoming God, help me to invite all to the table that Christ has set for us. Help me to have a heart for those who need hospitality, for it is in this welcoming that our hearts may continue to grow and stretch. Amen.

Wednesday of Holy Week

April 8 | Eric V. Beck

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? — 1 John 3:17

"They have nowhere to go, Dad. Jessica is a student and Daniel lost his job. Their landlord just more than doubled the rent and they can't pay. We either take them in or they'll be living in their car with little Anthony," my daughter pleaded.

Anthony was 8 months old.

"Well, what about their parents, or relatives maybe?" I asked.

"Their parents can't afford to help, and live on the other side of the country," my daughter replied.

"OK," I said.

Jessica was my daughter's age, just 21 or so, and attended the local community college with her. This young, struggling couple reminded me of my wife and myself at that age. At one point we had nothing and were forced to live with our newborn son in a travel trailer in a backyard with no heat or running water, and used the help of social services to get by while I worked 19-hour days with three jobs.

"We'll have to break out the camping pads and sleeping bags. They can stay as long as they need," I told my daughter.

And so, the young parents and their son found a refuge in their time of need. The beloved community is supposed to be one of love, grace and hospitality where we identify as one large family and none are in want. If this is to be true, then we must make it so.

God, open my heart to the opportunities to share with others, and in doing so show the world your grace and goodness. Amen.

"The Washing of the Feet" mosaic at Hosios Loukas, a monastery near Distomo, Greece, reminds us of the power of being vulnerable with one another.



Getty Images

Maundy Thursday

April 9 | Frances Wattman Rosenau

You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. — John 13:13–17

In confirmation class, I learned that there are two sacraments in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) — baptism and the Lord's Supper. I also learned that our definition for a sacrament is that it must be 1) a direct commandment of Jesus and 2) that is meant for everyone. Somehow, foot washing didn't make the cut.

Jesus says very clearly in this passage that we are to wash one another's feet and follow his example. He even says we'll be blessed if we do. So why don't we?

My hunch is that foot washing makes culturally Euro-centric Americans too uncomfortable. We prefer polite orderliness in church and have a particular aversion to anything too bodily. Yet it turns out, our emotions give us bodily sensations. After my children have overwhelming feelings, I ask them where they felt it in their bodies. "In my throat," my 4-year-old says, describing his sadness. "In my legs; I wanted to run," says my 7-year-old when

he was frustrated and angry at the same time. When they know what the physical sensation is, they are more likely to recognize it the next time around, then sit with and breathe through the physical sensation while it is with them.

Foot washing makes us feel uncomfortable and vulnerable. Perhaps that's why we need it. We need to spend more time precisely with our discomfort and vulnerability in these hours before the cross. Jesus' last days are all about his body: his arrest, beating, execution, death and burial. It's no mistake that the two traditions connected with Maundy Thursday — the washing of feet and then the breaking of the bread — are connected to Christ's body.

This day and this night, may we be aware of the place our two feet are planted. May we walk the journey of these next few days allowing the experience to speak to us through the breadth of our senses.

Jesus, we have been walking with you this season of Lent. This day, the journey becomes uniquely yours. If the story of Maundy Thursday is familiar to us, give us a new insight we need to hear. And if it is new for us, fill us with awe at how you chose to live and die. In your precious name we pray. Amen.



Getty Images

Intense colors of this modern mosaic, origin unknown, capture the intensity of the cross of Good Friday. Reflect on this day, its intensity, its significance.

Good Friday

April 10 | Eric V. Beck

Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? — Luke 14:27-28

I was walking a picket line with striking truckers, when out of nowhere came, “You shouldn’t be out here. It’s illegal.” I looked around for the owner of the voice, only to be staring at a police officer.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“The church isn’t supposed to be involved in politics,” the officer said.

In a soft, respectful and nonconfrontational voice, I asked the officer, “Who told you that?” I then explained to her that while by law I can’t support or oppose a political

candidate from the pulpit, I can — and will — support workers who are abused or oppressed.

“If that’s political, then so be it, because Jesus was political,” I said, adding how Jesus himself spoke truth to power to those who had corrupted God’s laws into a system of legalism that oppressed and abused people. “That’s what got him killed. I’d say I’m in pretty good company.”

“I disagree and say the church has absolutely no business being out here,” the officer said. She then turned and walked away.

Shouldering my sign, I lifted a silent prayer and continued to walk the picket line with the striking truckers.

God, I hear the call to follow and I want to obey, but it’s hard sometimes, especially when friends, family and those in authority oppose what it is you tell me to do. Grant me the courage to face my fear and follow Jesus. Amen.

Holy Saturday

April 11 | Rae Chen Huang

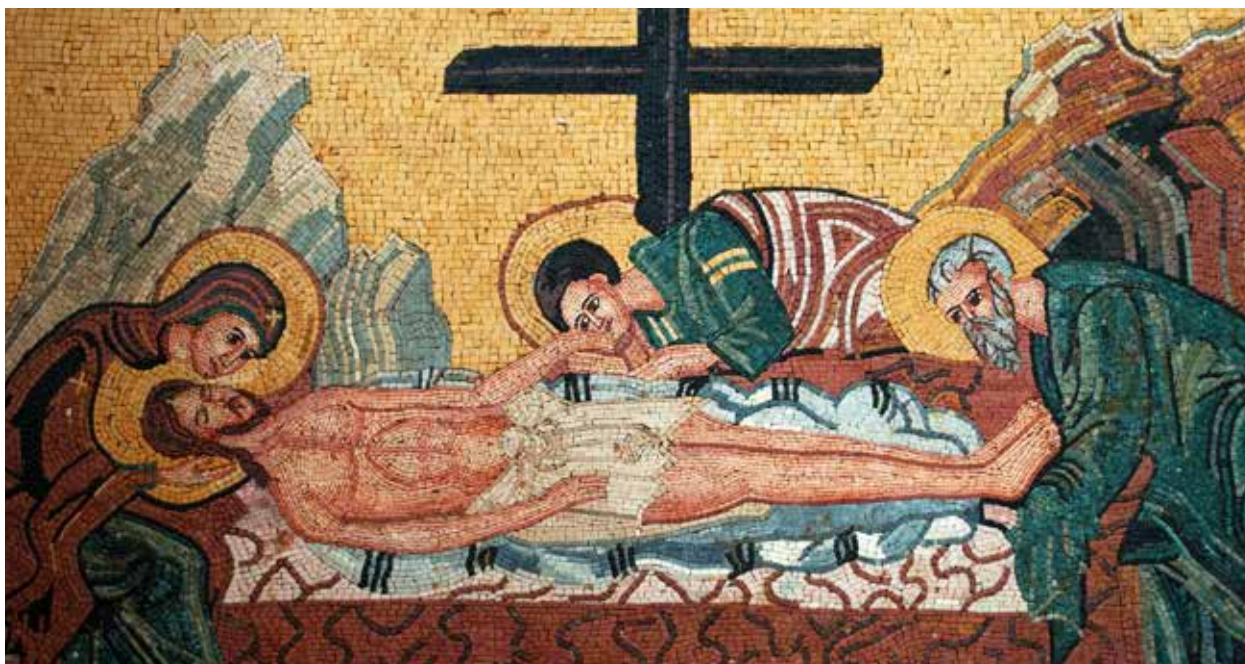
When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ... Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ... There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. ... Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

— Mark 15:33–46

Holy Saturday is the lesser of our holy days. We don't do much on this day. Some of us host Easter vigils or prepare for our Easter Sunday meal, but other than that we don't spend too much time preparing for the resurrection. Think about it. We just spent 40 days in Lent, preparing for Jesus' death, and then we get one Holy Saturday to prepare for resurrection.

A mosaic in St. George Greek Orthodox Church, Jordan, reminds us to sit with the grief and wait even when hopes are dashed.

Getty Images



New life takes time. It took seven years in a long-term relationship for me to feel ready to have a child, nine months for me to carry my child to term, nine months to prepare my house and my mind for a baby and too many hours of labor and delivery.

New life takes time to process, prepare, ponder ...

Recently, I've been learning about the Notorious RBG, the small, but fierce, infamous dissenter, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She has spent the majority of her career advocating for women's rights and gender equality. Like a good organizer, she has charted a strategic course to end gender discrimination one case at a time, building on each successive victory.

At her Supreme Court confirmation hearing in 1993, she said, "Generally, change in our society is incremental. Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time."

Resurrection is a process. Resurrection is something we plan and prepare for. Resurrection is something we must create and build. Resurrection is something that happens one step at a time. Holy Saturday is the beginning of resurrection.

Ever-loving God, most days we are living in a season of Holy Saturday. Our Messiah has died, and like Jesus, we feel like we've been forsaken, and we don't know what's next. Remind us that resurrection happens one step at a time. Inspire us to join as co-creators in building the beloved community. Empower us to prepare for resurrection; not only for ourselves, but so that all may experience new life. Amen.

Easter Sunday

April 12 | Bethany McKinney Fox

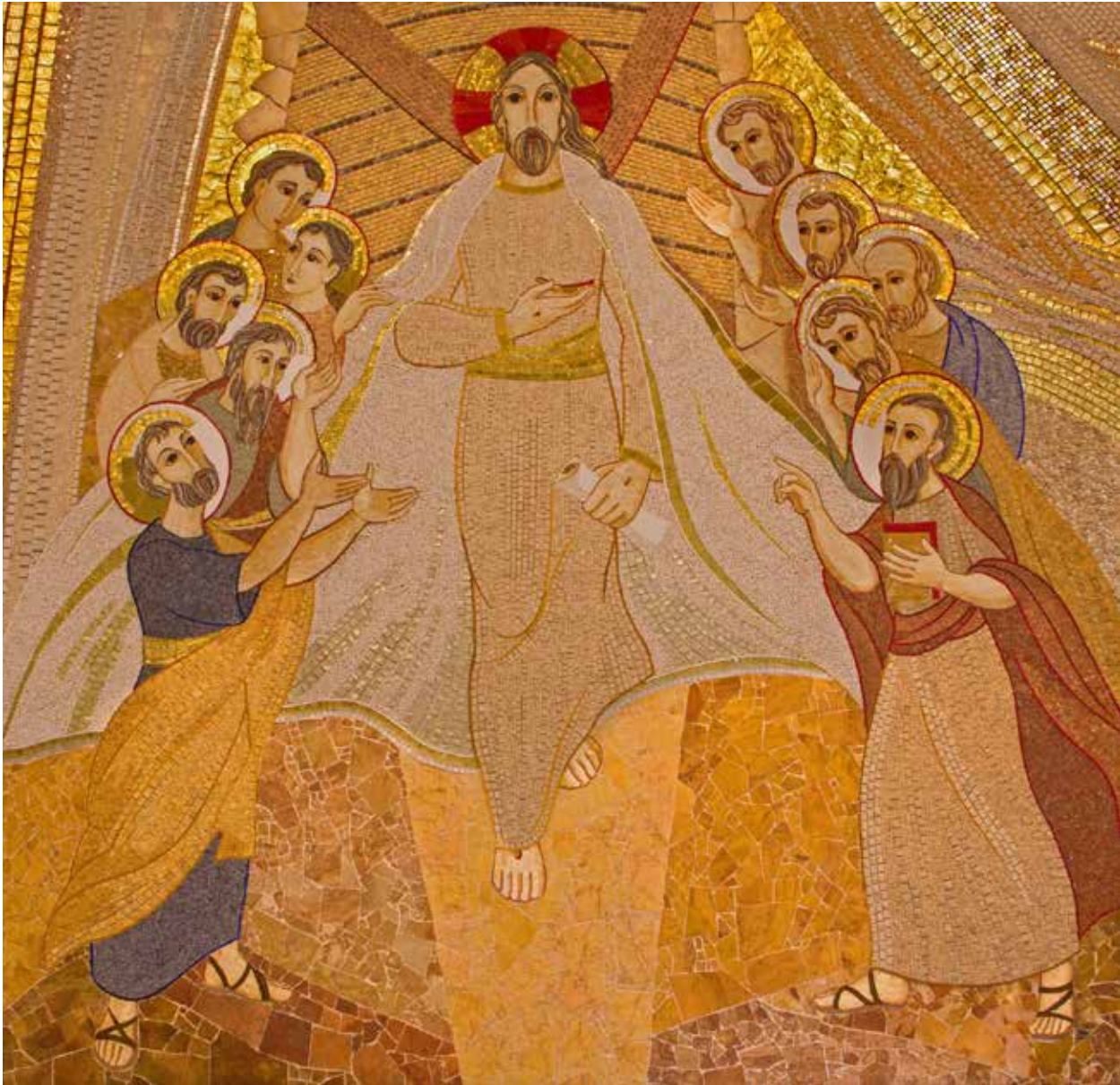
After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." — Matthew 28:1–10

In high school, I told a campus ministry leader that someday I might like to be a pastor. When we later met at a cafe to talk about it, she showed me all the Bible passages that said women should not be leaders in the church and explained that it was not God's plan for me to be a pastor. For a while, I believed her.

Like many of us, I've come to know many stories of folks who have been made to feel like they could not lead or that their voice was not important in faith communities. But today we celebrate this key moment in our faith — the powerful moment Jesus is raised from the dead, inviting us to recall again that we have a God who is stronger than death and who even out of death can bring new life.

And who were the first people to discover this history-shaking truth? A couple of women. Jesus continues to empower people whose value may not be perceived by the broader context. Now that's a mark of a beloved community — when powerful messages are entrusted to people who often haven't had a chance to bear them.

Hallelujah, Jesus! What an amazing day to remember that you are alive in our midst! Remind us of your rescuing, liberating power that's in and around us and all throughout your world. We pray for everyone you call to bear this life-giving message, especially for people who, because of their gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class, education level or any other reason, have been told they cannot bear your message. Let us be a community that says "yes!" to their voices. Let us pay attention. Let us stop practices and structures that need to die. Let us be brought to new life as your beloved community. In the mighty name of the resurrected Jesus, we pray! Amen.



A mosaic of the resurrected Christ among the apostles in St. Sebastian's Cathedral in Bratislava, Slovakia, is a celebration of the powerful witness of God's promises to that beloved community. What will be the story of resurrection hope that you will share this day?

The beloved community of writers



Rev. Dr. Sunny Kang is the senior pastor of United University Church in Los Angeles. He has served as a pastor, college chaplain and Christian education director, as well as national staff with Self-Development of People (SDOP). Sunny has lectured on racial-ethnic identity of post-immigration communities. He was a member of a team to write a book that discussed Asian North American ministry subsequent to immigration. He is active in the community, serving many organizations, including the Korean Family Resource Center and the Asian Ministry Connection (AMC).



Rev. Dr. Amanda Adams Riley is the parish associate at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles and co-pastor of The Garden Church in San Pedro, California. The Garden Church is re-imagining church — worshiping, loving and serving together — as a plot of land is transformed into an urban garden. Through her work with The Garden Church, Amanda has experienced the meaning of beloved community in a new way — working across denominational lines and lines of culture, gender identity, race and economic privilege.



Rev. Peter Dunn is the senior pastor of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Redondo Beach, California. He leads a homeless ministry that regularly provides support to the 60–80 people who come for lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays. St. Andrew's has helped many people find stable housing and provided for their spiritual and physical well-being.



Rev. Linda L. Culbertson is the general presbyter of the Presbytery of the Pacific. She also serves as the mid council advisor for Southeast Asian Immigrant Ministries. She says that part of her ministry journey has been “working toward becoming a beloved community, breaking down those dividing walls and making way for the love of God for all humankind to take root in my own heart, one transformative encounter at a time.”



Rev. Emmanuel “Eman” G. Orendain moved to California from the Philippines in 2002 to join his wife, Maribel, and three daughters, who are now in their 20s. He has been serving as the pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, California, for 17 years. Calvary is the largest Filipino congregation in the PC(USA).



Rev. Dr. Frances Wattman Rosenau is the pastor of Culver City Presbyterian Church in greater Los Angeles. Her ministry is driven toward antiracism and community equity through daily living with her neighbors.



Rev. Dr. Bethany McKinney Fox is the founding pastor of Beloved Everybody Church in Los Angeles. In this community, people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities participate and lead worship together. Bethany says that working to build an ability-inclusive community is exciting “because it requires a reliance on the Holy Spirit as we learn to engage God and one another beyond merely words and intellect.”



Rev. Dr. Harold E. Kidd, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Inglewood, California, says, “I live and pastor in a region and city with constantly changing demographics. Ministry in such a context provides great opportunities in building relationships with persons from all walks of life. In this way, we are becoming God's beloved community.”



Eric V. Beck is a ruling elder of the First Presbyterian Church of San Pedro, California. A Teamster for almost 30 years, Eric has served as a union steward and is active with the interfaith social and economic justice organizations LA Voice and CLUE: Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice. He also serves as moderator of the Presbytery of the Pacific.



Rev. Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder serves as the Presbyterian staff chaplain at the LAC+USC Medical Center in Los Angeles, where she provides spiritual support to patients, their families and the hospital staff. The chaplaincy ministry is made possible by the generous support of the presbyteries of Los Ranchos, Pacific, San Gabriel and San Fernando, and the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii. Elizabeth says she is excited to be a part of building beloved community because it is where she “most reliably encounters Jesus.”



Rev. Neema Cyrus-Franklin is the stated clerk and communications director for the Presbytery of the Pacific. A graduate of Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Neema is excited for the opportunities to grow together as the beloved community — “facing our fears, prejudices and our flawed understandings, so that in Christ, wrongs may be righted, hearts may be changed and we might live together in peace,” she says.



Rev. Liz Leavitt serves as pastor of Christ Church Uniting Disciples and Presbyterians, a yoked congregation in Kailua, Hawaii, on the island of Oahu. A native of the Pacific Northwest, Liz is passionate about environmental justice, ministry with young people and keeping the church in conversation with the growing body of those who have left the fold. Since moving to Hawaii five years ago, Liz has been asking lots of questions about what it means to create a sustainable, just and compassionate community amid diversity.



Rev. Rae Chen Huang is an ordained teaching elder in the PC(USA) and lead organizer with LA Voice, a member of the Faith in Action Network. She has more than 15 years of experience working in nonprofit, ecumenical and interfaith contexts domestically and abroad. She also works with the Kaleidoscope Institute, organizing faith leaders and clergy in antiracism work and leadership, and provides mediation support for communities and schools.



Victoria Barner is a commissioned lay pastor who works as an executive assistant to the director of the information technology department of the City of Costa Mesa in California. One of the things to do on her bucket list is to write a book about her experiences with God. “Writing for this devotional excited me because it provided me an opportunity to write down what I call glimpses at how the Lord is directing me on how he wants to use me for God’s beloved community,” she says.



Rev. Jacoba Vermaak serves as pastor of Wilshire Presbyterian Church, a multicultural urban faith community in Koreatown, Los Angeles. Jacoba says that creating community “within this urban anonymous diverse landscape that is Los Angeles requires an openness to adventure, uncertainties and the willingness to being stretched” — which she “loves and embraces (most of the time).”



Rev. Joshua Yee is the pastor at St. Luke’s Presbyterian Church in Rolling Hills Estates, California. Joshua recently completed a three-year term as the vice-moderator, moderator and chair of the Pacific Presbytery. He currently serves as moderator of the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii. Joshua has also served full time as a board-certified chaplain and manager of the Spiritual Care Department at Memorial Care Long Beach Medical Center and Miller Children’s and Women’s Hospital.



Rev. Mike Morgan is the pastor of caring ministries and outreach at Bel Air Church in Los Angeles. What excites Mike about participating in the building of God’s beloved community is “the reality of God’s Spirit working in and through me towards the people who are core to God’s heart.” He says that “living, serving and building in rhythm with the heart of God enlivens and awakens” him to “how wide and long and high and deep Christ’s love is for us.”

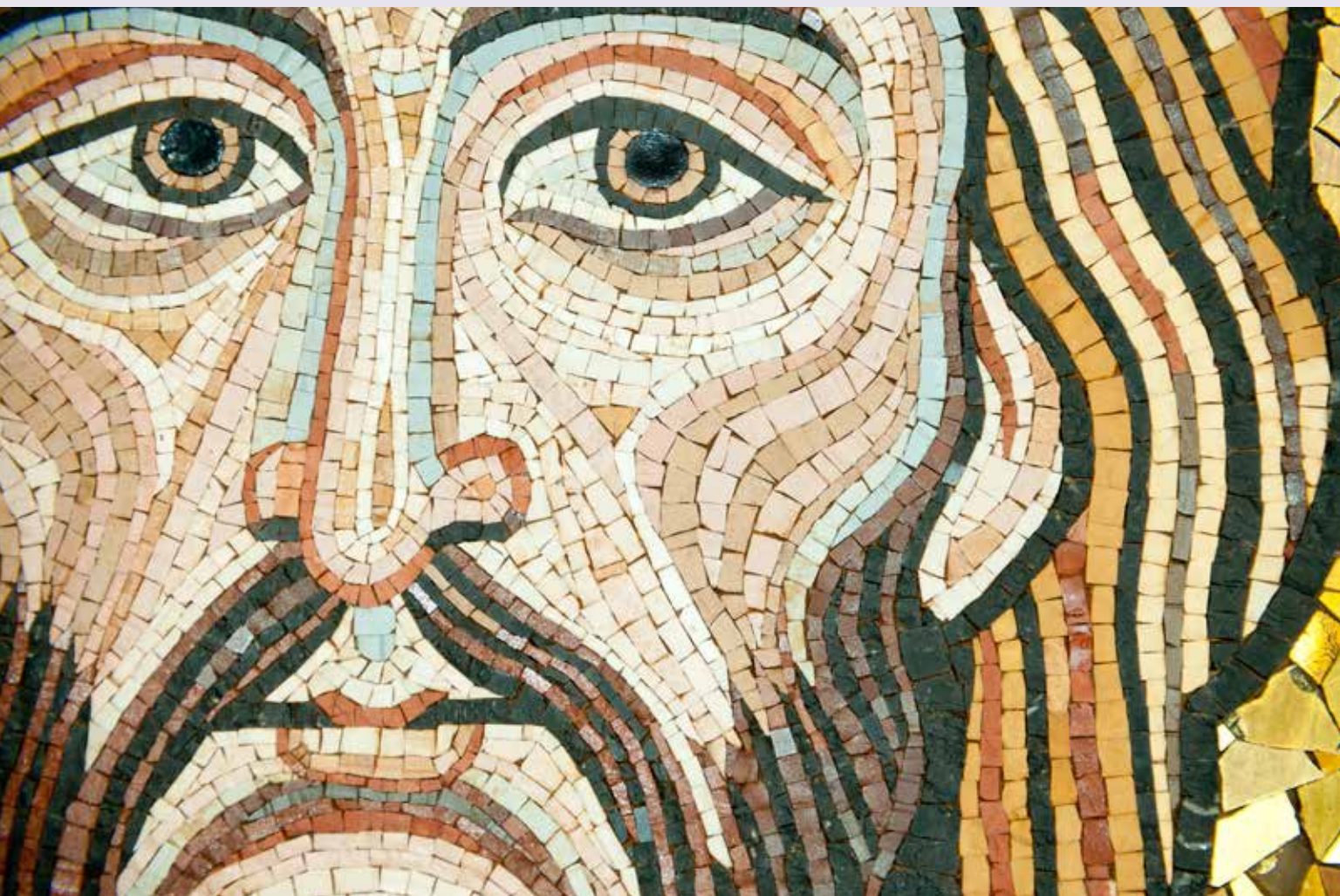


Rev. Paul Kang is the solo pastor of Korean Presbyterian Hosanna Church in Los Angeles. “I was excited that the Lenten Devotional 2020 invited me, whose English is a second language, to share the love, justice and peace of the beloved community,” he says.



Rev. Grace H. Park earned her Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Grace was ordained in 1996 and has served in various roles in the church — children’s pastor, youth pastor and associate pastor. She has served in urban missions with a focus on the homeless, as well as short-term missions in Mexico and Central America. She is pursuing her Doctorate of Ministry in a joint program with New York Theological Seminary and New Theological Seminary of the West.

Becoming a Beloved Community



Reprints

A limited number of reprints are available.

Single copy, \$5; 2–9 copies, \$3.75 each;

10–99 copies, \$2.75 each; 100 or more, \$2.15 each,
plus shipping and handling.

Please call 800-533-4371 and ask for 17116-19-008.

Order online at pcusa.org/pt-lent

Copyright © 2020.

All rights reserved.

Presbyterians Today

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Biblical quotations are from the
New Revised Standard Version.