



LENTEN
DEVOTIONAL

2021

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

- Lamentations 3:22-23

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning, new mercies I see.

As I was thinking about what a good theme for Lent might be this year, I was drawn to the assigned readings for Holy Week and in particular, the passages from Isaiah. They are an interesting selection for Holy Week because as the awful events of that fateful week unfold, they offer a counterpoint to consider: God's abiding presence even in the midst of Jesus' suffering. After a year in which so many people have experienced some sort of affliction - some the worst they have ever experienced in their lives - it seemed to make sense to consider the ways the biblical writers experienced or witnessed God's consolation in the midst of their trials.

Devotionals are for a source of consolation for many people. Some images, writings, or music might strike us as out-of-touch, naive, or simply wrong. Others we might find helpful and inspiring. Both responses are important and valid - worthy of consideration because they help us experience the other. This is said to be the real work of being human and of art. Devotionals give us the experience of being more present to those around us and to God. As you read, worship, and witness to God's grace this season of Lent, may you experience and come to know the gift of God's steadfast love.

by Rev. Matt Falco

Consolation contains the length of our love
Stretching gracefully long
A goodness sitting in our chests
Waiting to care for another
Ready for the despair that we will all walk
With grace together

by Derrick Meads

Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.
Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.

Psalm 25:5-6

My family loved two popular children's series as I was growing up- The Chronicles of Narnia and the Harry Potter series. There's probably many similarities between the two book series, but one very clear one is the existence of an, "old magic." In the Harry Potter books, the old magic is the love that Harry's mom has for him. Her love saves his life as she sacrifices her own. In The Chronicles of Narnia, the protagonist, Aslan, defeats the White Witch by sacrificing his life for another's which it turns out is a kind of old magic. It may feel uncomfortable to think of "magic," but these children's stories are onto something. Mercy and love are magical or otherworldly. We cannot totally explain how they work. How are they so healing? Where do mercy and love come from? The Psalmist tells us that God's mercy and love are, "from of old." Mercy and love might have been swirling around in the watery mix that became the first light of Creation, the Spirit hovering over top as it became life. The old magic, love, was the most powerful force in those children's books. Maybe because mercy and love are the very stuff we are made of. Loving might then be a returning back to who we were created to be, and that is some consolation. We have life-saving, creative power in our very bones, as old as creation's first light: God's love for you and for me.

by Rev. Rachel VanKirk Mathews

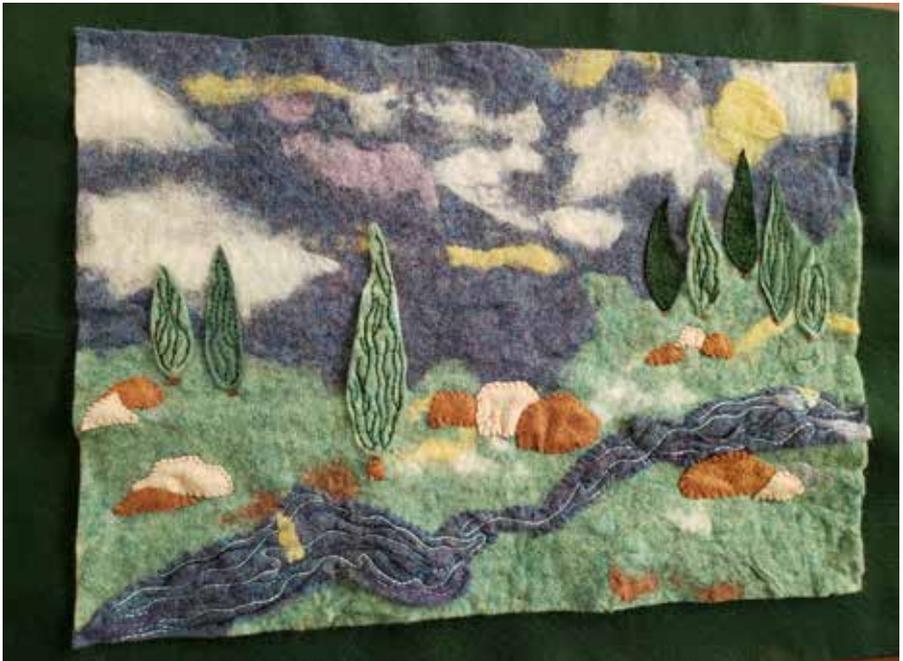
One Hundred Twenty One

Consolation has always come to me through nature. The beauty of the natural world has provided me with a connectedness to God throughout my life. I love the imagery of nature that is found throughout the Bible. Imagery from Psalm 121 is what inspired this piece.

“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come?” These first words of Psalm 121 must have gone through my mind one thousand times or more when my husband died, nine years ago. “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” These words eventually brought consolation to me, which is what I have tried to represent through my art.

I am grateful for the beauty found in nature, given to us by God. Even in our moments of deepest despair, I believe that through nature, God is telling us, “I am right here with you.”

by Suzanne Burns



Your Consolations

This is a space to reflect and journal about your week. Think about the ways God's consolation has been present in your life.



Consolation - We are Shielded

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills —
from where will my help come?
- 2 My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- 4 He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
- 6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
- 7 The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
- 8 The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.

Psalm 121

The words of the 121st Psalm have brought feelings of peace and assurance to countless generations of the faithful. Many of us know what it feels like to be under attack... by critics, by our own feelings of inadequacy, by our frailty and finitude, by a system that is at best disinterested in our individual well-being or at worst stacked against us. The feeling can be as intense as the heat of the midday sun or as

isolating as the darkness of the middle of the night. The psalmist assures us that the transcendent God who crafted the greatness of heaven and earth, the One who is surely greater than the challenge you face today, is present to you personally and available to you in your time of need. God's presence equips you to be in the world. Paul wrote of the "armor of God." (Eph. 6.11). There is a varied tradition within Christianity known as the Breastplate of Christ most frequently connected with St. Patrick. Here are 15 lines from the larger prayer that can help guide your meditation today...

Christ with me,
 Christ before me,
 Christ behind me,
 Christ in me,
 Christ beneath me,
 Christ above me,
 Christ on my right,
 Christ on my left,
 Christ when I lie down,
 Christ when I sit down,
 Christ when I arise,
 Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
 Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
 Christ in every eye that sees me,
 Christ in every ear that hears me.
 Amen

by Rev. Matt Falco

Facing the Dangers

O God, whose son Jesus did no fear to go into
the city where he would be murdered,
save us in the congregation from fear
of facing the dangers that confront us in our city.

Give us courage to pick up our murdered hopes
and begin again.

Bless those who face pain, disappoint, and death,
that they find hope in you.

Comfort those who are in bereavement,
and let us receive with thanksgiving
the benefits of those who have died.

O God, who son Jesus made himself vulnerable
to take common cause with children,
the weak, the poor, the outsider, the unpopular;
awaken in us compassion for all who struggle
against the odds.

Nourish un us the capacity to bear insult and
forbear injury, knowing our own aggressions,
and seeking ever to understand rather than to provoke.

Make us tender through suffering
and generous through loss.

Help us so to value each person among us
for who he is rather than what he does
that we may live together without envy or malice
and grow in affection with glad trust.

O God, whose son Jesus put himself in jeopardy
to make a daring dream come true,
grant us us in the common ventures of our time and place
to be daring in action,
risking our investments,
and investing ourselves
for the sake of the future
in honor of the past
and to fulfill the present.

Submitted by Douglas Ensminger

Many people find comfort in the hymns and music of the Christian tradition. Each week, we're offering a hymn for you to reflect on. We encourage you to google these hymns and give them a listen... you will find all of them on YouTube and other music platforms. If you find an arrangement you find particularly comforting, share it with your friends. Is the hymn new to you? Is it an old favorite? What, if anything, about the hymn do you find consoling? The tune? The words? The memories it conjures? The promises made in the hymn? Does it inspire you to think or feel differently about your day?

Jesus, Lover of My Soul

Originally titled "In Temptation," these four stanzas (of five) call to mind how a spiritual and emotional tempest can move from turmoil to tranquility. This tune was first used with this text in a cantata by the composer in 1910, and since then has become the standard one.

1 Jesus, lover of my soul,
let me to thy bosom fly,
while the nearer waters roll,
while the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,
till the storm of life is past.
Safe into the haven guide.
O receive my soul at last!

2 Other refuge have I none;
hangs my helpless soul on thee.
Leave, ah! leave me not alone;

still support and comfort me.
All my trust on thee is stayed;
all my help from thee I bring.
Cover my defenseless head
with the shadow of thy wing.

3 Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
more than all in thee I find.
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is thy name;
I am all unrighteousness.
False and full of sin I am;
thou art full of truth and grace.

4 Plenteous grace with thee is found,
grace to cover all my sin.
Let the healing streams abound;
make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art;
freely let me take of thee.
Spring thou up within my heart.
Rise to all eternity.

Meet me, O Christ,
In the stillness of morning.
Meet me, O Spirit,
To quiet my heart.
Mend me, O Father,
From yesterday's harms.

From the discords of yesterday,
Resurrect my peace.
From the discouragements of yesterday,
Resurrect my hope.
From the weariness of yesterday,
Resurrect my strength.
From the doubts of yesterday,
Resurrect my faith.
From the wounds of yesterday,
Resurrect my love.

Let me enter this new day, aware of my need,
And awake to your grace, O Lord.
Amen.

A liturgy for the Ritual of Morning Coffee from "Every Moment Holy"



The poor will eat and be satisfied;

those who seek the Lord will praise God—
may your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations

will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord,
God rules over the nations.

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;

all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.

Posterity will serve God;

future generations will be told about the Lord.

They will proclaim God's righteousness,

declaring to a people yet unborn:

God has done it!

Psalm 22:26-31

In this Psalm passage, the Psalmist goes from describing a heavenly vision of all of the poor having what they need and beyond to a vision of all of the rich feasting and worshiping. The transition from God feeding the poor to feeding the rich is confusing. What does the Psalmist mean by describing a feast for the rich laid out by God?

In between those two verses, we see yet another vision of all of the nations worshipping God, all of the families and people from east to west, north to south. This is not an evangelical vision of all people in perfect spiritual or doctrinal agreement. This is not a vision of uniformity in place of God's marvelous

diversity as all knees bow in humility, gratitude, and reverence. This middle vision calls forth the feeling of connection to all of creation. This middle vision is a universal recognition of how much we have in common with one another. All of humanity is suspected to share 99.9% of our DNA in common!

When we think over the diversity of humankind, how mind boggling is it that we share so incredibly much more in common? What could a vision of all we share in common look like? An unending ocean of all the spirits of humankind past, present, and future singing in gratitude to their Creator. A vision like that could transform reality, make all people rich and bring everyone to a joyous feast together. Can we take consolation in knowing that such transformation really is possible? We get glimpses of it in the generosity, joy, beauty, and love we see and know each day. Heaven is already at hand. Take comfort in the heavenly realm with all of the saints and all of life's gifts right around you.

by Rev. Rachel VanKirk Mathews

Even though I have lived in Kentucky for 30 years I am still excited by the sight of a male cardinal with its radiant red feathers. They are not common in western Pennsylvania where I grew up. I take consolation in seeing cardinals. You see, last spring a cardinal used to sit regularly on the driver side mirror of our son Chris' car when it was parked in our driveway. I can still see and hear Chris excitedly ask me if I had seen the bird on his car, too. I told him that I had, and I thought it was just like Chris to notice and enjoy such a small pleasure.

Then Chris died in June, and Bob and I were overcome with grief.

That summer Bob and I saw many cardinals while sitting on our back deck. I came to believe that they were Chris' spirit - a small spark of God's promise - telling me that Chris was at peace and for me not to be sad. The sight of cardinals gave me some consolation amidst those difficult days.

It is now a new year with lots of changes and challenges. One mid-January day I was in the garage looking for something on a shelf next to the window. I heard a sound which I ignored, thinking something had shifted on the shelves. I heard it again. When I looked up a cardinal was tapping at the window in the pane nearest to me. After a few seconds he flew a short distance, perched on our fence and sat in the sunshine.

I felt some consolation again.

by Jackie DeCree

Your Consolations

This is a space to reflect and journal about your week. Think about the ways God's consolation has been present in your life.



Consolation - The Precepts of God

- 73 Your hands have made and fashioned me;
give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.
- 74 Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice,
because I have hoped in your word.
- 75 I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right,
and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.
- 76 Let your steadfast love become my comfort
according to your promise to your servant.
- 77 Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;
for your law is my delight.
- 78 Let the arrogant be put to shame,
because they have subverted me with guile;
as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.
- 79 Let those who fear you turn to me,
so that they may know your decrees.
- 80 May my heart be blameless in your statutes,
so that I may not be put to shame.

Psalm 119:73-80

Google quotes about rules, and you'll find that the most popular ones have to do with breaking them. We tend to think of rules as boundaries or limits, and the church has certainly used them this way... to isolate communities of color in South Africa, to keep people enslaved in our own country, to keep women out of positions of power, to dehumanize the LGBTQ community, and so on. Given this history, I can understand why it can be difficult to appreciate the way the psalmist delights in God's law. Jesus summed up God's law this way: 'Love the Lord

your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt 22.37-40) I personally resonate with Pablo Picasso who said, ““Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.” Boundary breaking artists advance an art; they don’t stifle it or hold it back. As Christians who are called to expand God’s beloved community, we need to be boundary breakers when it comes to the law of love. I invite you to meditate on the law of God’s love, and to ask yourself, what boundary or limit on God’s love might you be called to break today?

by Rev. Matt Falco

America: love it and change it

O Lord
bless our country and countrymen
middle-Americans and middle-agers
and everybody on all sides of
every dividing line
politicians and priests
diplomats and ditchdiggers

Restore our trust in one another
Renew our respect for diversity
Let us not confuse dissent
with disloyalty
nor patriotism
with partisanship
Let us love America
and change it
and shape it
until our alabaster cities
are undimmed by human tears

Renew our confidence
in the nobility of the dreams
of our forefathers
and our own
while we acknowledge our mistakes
and failures
Forgive us for pride in our own righteousness
and believing that you are on our side
Staunch the tears of the angry poor
Turn our might to creation
instead of destruction
Make us not wolves of prey
seeking domination
but people of peace
seeking reconciliation

Submitted by Douglas Ensminger

Many people find comfort in the hymns and music of the Christian tradition. Each week, we're offering a hymn for you to reflect on. We encourage you to google these hymns and give them a listen... you will find all of them on YouTube and other music platforms. If you find an arrangement you find particularly comforting, share it with your friends. Is the hymn new to you? Is it an old favorite? What, if anything, about the hymn do you find consoling? The tune? The words? The memories it conjures? The promises made in the hymn? Does it inspire you to think or feel differently about your day?

Abide with Me

By blending end of day and end of life, the imagery of this well-known Victorian hymn has made it valuable for both evening services and funerals. Although the author wrote his own music for it, the tune we use in our hymnal has been firmly associated with this text for over 150 years.

1 Abide with me: fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
help of the helpless, O abide with me.

2 Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
change and decay in all around I see.
O thou who changest not, abide with me.

3 I need thy presence every passing hour;
what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

4 I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.

5 Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

The Peace of Wild Things

by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.



The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

Psalm 19:1-6

Close your eyes and think of being outdoors. Take a deep breath. What is coming to mind? I think of the great, green mountain landscape of Peru and the wondrous flowering plants of Hawaii, different from any I'd ever seen. I think about the drive home from college that I made many times and its green rolling hills. Both the fine, white sand of the Gulf Shores and the long rows of my grandparent's vegetable garden come to mind. From childhood until now, my memory is filled with beautiful scenes from travels or long hours spent in their midst. Nature offers us all two gifts that are healing. The grass, trees, sky, all of nature is a theatre through which mystery is acting. The great outdoors are the great play place of mystery and wonder, and we get to sit in the audience or bring forward a memory of a time we sat in the presence of mystery. Even with

all we know about the natural world, seeing a flower bloom, a wide open horizon, or an animal in motion evokes a sense of awe.

So much of the Bible, like the passage above, describes creation and the Creator in poetry. Like life's other great mysteries—suffering, death, love, life, the mystery of nature moves beyond our human reasoning and logic. This is the other gift of nature. Being outdoors gives one permission to set oneself aside. When suffering and death are not immediately touching our life, we might become too consumed with our own success, worries, or desires. The mystery of nature encourages us to set all of that aside for a short while. When suffering has come to our door, nature gives us permission to be distracted from the pain or the grief even just for as short as a deep breath of fresh air.

May the newness of each day's fresh air, the beauty of the skies, the warmth of the sun, and all else that creation has to offer bring you comfort this day. May we all be open to its gifts of mystery and relief.



Consolation

by Gregory F. Harper

The word “consolation” carries a variety of meanings. In general, it means to ease the burden of mental or physical pain. Some consolation is better than others. A movie, the name of which I have long forgotten, featured a youth baseball team playing a “consolation” game after losing the championship. The team then proceeded to lose that game as well, causing one of the players to mutter “some consolation, we got to get beaten twice!”

I am sure that most of you have needed or given consolation after a loss or defeat with varying degrees of success, whether the occasion was as minor as a poor performance, or as major as the death of a loved one. These consolations are important. Personally, however, my ultimate consolation comes from these words, written by a man named Paul some 2000 years ago “For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8: 38-39)

Your Consolations

This is a space to reflect and journal about your week. Think about the ways God's consolation has been present in your life.



Consolation - The Gift of All God Has Made

- 9 The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.
- 10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
and all your faithful shall bless you.
- 11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,
and tell of your power,
- 12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
- 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Psalm 145.9-13

Over the last year, many people have re-discovered the solace that can be experienced in nature. Even on a brisk 36 degree afternoon, I recently found a good-sized crowd enjoying the woods in one of our local parks. Despite the lack of green leaves adorning the deciduous trees, the contrast between the almost fluorescent green mosses of the ground, the glistening of an ice-crusting stream, and the brilliant blue sky was simply marvelous. Contrary to what I think is often assumed, even the typically-heady theologians throughout the centuries have experienced God's consolation in the simplicity and beauty of nature. I hear Jesus echoing the psalmist's understanding of God's concern for all of nature when he says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." Surely if God is concerned for a sparrow, then God must be concerned for you. I invite you to take notice of the sparrows and the other birds who visit near your windows this week. Contemplate the ways that even these speak to you about the glory of God's beloved community.

by Rev. Matt Falco

A Lenten 2021 Ruminaton on Isaiah 40
by Jason Williams

To fast after so long a fast,
to contemplate sacrifice after sacrificing so much--
do we call it a secondary surge?

In this season,
we listen to passages of renewal, of consolation
but what shape does consolation take
when our shared horror somehow only swells the numbers in
our tribes?
When we waltz past one other amidst the cataclysm?

Ambulances circling the block in L.A.,
threadbare clinics in Baltimore and Philly
giving suburban white folks
directions to come get their vaccines.

The mountains are lifted up.
They loom.
The valleys crumble, collapse.

--

I read that this passage spoke to the Hebrew people in exile.
Surely then, it can speak to us, too--
in exile from one other.
It's been over a year since I hugged my mom and dad.
(And, let me tell you, we are huggers.)

Now, in winter,
we're privileged, grateful to have our digitized loved ones on
Zoom,
friendships confined to serialized conversations
and the narrow frame of iPad screens.

--

The Hebrew word in this passage for “comfort” and “consolation”
also means “to regret,” “to change one’s mind,” “to relent.”

And maybe that--

if it is to bring consolation at all--
is what this Lent has to be about.

To relent in our insomniac arguments with people who won't
wear masks.

To relent in trying to understand why others are so furious.

Or why we are.

To relent and realize we will never earn our return from this
exile

through bodily healing alone.

Less still, through our rightness or righteousness.

We, too, are like grass. Wavering in every breeze.

What, then, will bring our healing, our homecoming?

Have we not known?

Have we not heard?

Have we not been told from the beginning?

Only grace.

Many people find comfort in the hymns and music of the Christian tradition. Each week, we're offering a hymn for you to reflect on. We encourage you to google these hymns and give them a listen... you will find all of them on YouTube and other music platforms. If you find an arrangement you find particularly comforting, share it with your friends. Is the hymn new to you? Is it an old favorite? What, if anything, about the hymn do you find consoling? The tune? The words? The memories it conjures? The promises made in the hymn? Does it inspire you to think or feel differently about your day?

There is a Place of Quiet Rest (Near to the Heart of God)

Near to the Heart of God A Presbyterian campus pastor and choir director in Missouri wrote this simple but moving hymn in response to the death of two young nieces from diphtheria. By distilling such personal grief into the shared assurances of faith, these words have brought comfort to many.

1 There is a place of quiet rest,
near to the heart of God,
a place where sin cannot molest,
near to the heart of God.

Refrain:

O Jesus, blest Redeemer,
sent from the heart of God,
hold us, who wait before thee,
near to the heart of God.

2 There is a place of comfort sweet,
near to the heart of God,
a place where we our Savior meet,
near to the heart of God. (Refrain)

3 There is a place of full release,
near to the heart of God,
a place where all is joy and peace,
near to the heart of God. (Refrain)

Buy Green Bananas

by Janet (Degener) Lumpp

As my parents' health declined over the past several years, a metaphor emerged for their philosophy on life. If you buy green bananas, it shows that you have hope that you are going to live long enough for them to ripen and be eaten a few days from now. Buying ripe bananas to eat today was admitting that you had given up on the future. When people would ask them how they were doing, they would often say, "I'm still buying green bananas." I'm not sure that the answer made sense to everyone. As a witness to these recent years, I offer my own observations to help explain the answer.

From my parents' point of view, it was not possible to simultaneously live in the hope of recovery from disease and to prepare for death. These two paths were perpendicular. They wisely followed the path of preparation earlier in their lives when the end was far off in the distance. A solid financial foundation was laid upon which they built our family life, put all of us through college and helped us get started laying our own foundations. We are grateful for their generosity and for the freedom from concern over how we would pay for their care later in life. My father was able to retire as soon as the youngest graduated from college. Together, my parents spent many years on the living pathway enjoying their grandchildren, gardens, church activities and giving of themselves. As their declining health became harder to ignore, they still saw themselves living in hope and viewed the alternate pathway as a short final jaunt they would have to be forced onto. Doctors and therapists at the hospital would ask them about their goals for recovery and all they wanted was to go home and be themselves.

Giving up hope was not an option, even if that made things more difficult for their children and caregivers. We admired and cursed their stubborn independence. We wanted them to live comfortably with fewer household chores but they defined themselves by what they did for themselves and what they did for others. To hand over any task was akin to having a piece of themselves taken away. Moving into a retirement community would have meant a raised flowerbed in place of an acre of Eden, two burners and a microwave oven instead of the kitchen being the center of the house, and room for only one or two sewing machines instead of six or seven! Such choices were fine for other people who needed to downsize, but my Mom always said, “We’re not there, yet”.

Buying green bananas is not that same as the “give a man a fish - he eats for a day, teach a man to fish - he eats for a lifetime” metaphor. My parents had already taught us to fish. Three of the four of us have even owned boats! The green bananas metaphor represented their state of mind and was not necessarily intended to apply to anyone else. Younger, more active people were free to stop at the store often and buy the yellow bananas. Busy, working people were allowed to hire mowing and cleaning services.

Declaring “I’m still buying green bananas” was also one of the ways my parents shared their faith. Their faith was quiet, except for the singing, and evident in all that they did. No flowery religious phrases, just everyday trust and belief that God is in charge, leads us where we can be useful and speaks to us through the beauty of the earth.

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

Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story—
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,
those he gathered from the lands,
from east and west, from north and south.

Psalm 107:1-3

God is good. All the time. A common church call and response. You may have heard Sunday school teachers use the phrase to calm a classroom of elementary students, or church campers, or just a joyful preacher from the pulpit. If we're in the right mindset, the call and response can fill us with confidence and joy about the Biblical refrain: God is good!

Yet, the age old question that the Hebrew people had to wrestle with can sometimes hold us back from affirming or celebrating God's goodness with full confidence. We may never be able to answer the question, where does evil come from? As the first people in their part of the world to worship just one God, to be monotheists, the Hebrew people were forced into this question. If there's only one God and if God is good, where does evil come from? The Hebrew people decided it was through creation, something that was of God yet separated from God, that evil came. Evil, sin, separateness from God were just a part of being human for the Hebrew people.

If God is wholly other than creation, if our separateness from God means sin is a part of our nature, we will never reach a state of no suffering without God. Is that a comfort? Maybe on some days, it can be a consolation that suffering is shared across humankind? And maybe on some days, it brings us hope that God is not the source of suffering? Maybe it brings us comfort that God is something other than the pain we have known or felt?

by Rev. Rachel VanKirk Mathews

Consolation

by Stan Brunn

Lent is a time for deep devotion
Calling for some soul searching and reflection
And calls for healing and spiritual restoration
Not only for the self, but for the nation.

Each of us brings to Earth some addition
It may be long held gift or a recent exploration
Or a recent healing that brings elation
And an exit from some wrenching desolation.

Recovering from a loss calls for some ovation
That may be silent or a long-hidden emotion
Expressed through personal prayers and medication
Or a spiritual uplift from a congregation.

Lent can bring a new faith expedition
Where the spirit turns in a new direction
That for life's meaning is a valued contribution
Experienced in some spiritual resurrection.

With collective efforts to improve the human condition
We seek unity with humility and communion
Knowing what is the correct direction
Supported with some much-sought spiritual navigation.

Lent is a season for declaring some resolution
That rights some inward centered affection
That discovers a new God with some exhilaration
To glow as part of an earth-human constellation.

Lent is a season for "rewarded" addition
Pursuing simplicity over pompous glorification
Discovering those small gifts of inner unification
Knowing they are the best of any consolation.

Your Consolations

This is a space to reflect and journal about your week. Think about the ways God's consolation has been present in your life.

Consolation - Grief

- 1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger,
or discipline me in your wrath.
- 2 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.
- 3 My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O LORD — how long?
- 4 Turn, O LORD, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.
- 5 For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who can give you praise?
- 6 I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
- 7 My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.

Psalm 6.1-7

This season of reflection has invited me to think about the process of grieving as a consolation of God in and of itself, not as a process to work through to arrive at consolation. We can think about grieving as a process with phases we work through - not as a sequential set of steps one must take, but as distinct modes of experience - modes such as anger, denial, acceptance. Sometimes we experience these feelings simultaneously. Sometimes certain phases seem strangely absent only to appear when we least expect them. There are flaws with this way of thinking about grief, but it can be helpful when it comes to having words to put to feelings we might not be accustomed to experiencing.

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The psalms can be thought of as prayers in the language of the heart, giving voice to our deepest feelings. In today's reading, the psalmist writes, "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eyes waste away because of grief..." What I have noticed about grief is that it takes a significant amount of space... space as in time (one is often forced by grief to slow down), emotional bandwidth (because of the intensity of the feelings), and a refusal of outside distraction (grief resists multitasking). I wonder if this space created by grief allows room for God to enter in? Jesus, in his sermon on the mount assures us that, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." As you think about your own experiences of grieving this day, what do you notice? Can you feel God's presence with you in these few moments of space offering you the consolation you need today?

by Rev. Matt Falco

O Lord, let my soul rise up to meet you
as the day rises to meet the sun.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Psalm 104:2 – 6

You wrap yourself with light as with a cloak : and spread out
the heavens like a curtain.

You lay the beams of your chambers in the waters above : you
make the clouds your chariot; you ride on the wings of the
wind.

You make the winds your messengers : and flames of fire your
servants.

You have set the earth upon its foundations : so that it never
shall move at any time.

You covered it with the Deep as with a mantle : the waters stood
higher than the mountains.

Bless the Lord, O my soul : how excellent is your greatness.

Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

Many people find comfort in the hymns and music of the Christian tradition. Each week, we're offering a hymn for you to reflect on. We encourage you to google these hymns and give them a listen... you will find all of them on YouTube and other music platforms. If you find an arrangement you find particularly comforting, share it with your friends. Is the hymn new to you? Is it an old favorite? What, if anything, about the hymn do you find consoling? The tune? The words? The memories it conjures? The promises made in the hymn? Does it inspire you to think or feel differently about your day?

O Love that Will Not Let Me Go

This intense hymn of commitment to God (addressed as Love, Light, and Joy) closes with an invocation of the ultimate testimony to those attributes (the Cross). The composer, a Scotsman, named this specially-composed tune for the 11th-century patroness of Scotland.

1 O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

2 O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;

my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

3 O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain
that morn shall tearless be.

4 O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.

Consolation

Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

In the darkest hours of my darkest nights, I lie awake, fearful thoughts consume my time. While my house quiets and settles and my family sleeps, I keep my thoughts locked away from this dread. This fear of losing all I know, of plans gone before their time, of memories erased and stories forgotten. I fear lost time and the terror of being alone.

My consolation in these sorrow-soaked nights come from a glowing screen of perfect lives. My television is there for me 24 hours a day, never wavering in its support of my need for distraction and company. Journaling exhausted me, Zen art projects overwhelmed, beautiful books held no appeal. Character building takes a back seat when one's endurance is being tested to its limits. I had a young family and a cancer fight to deal with. My hands were full.

Each night I'd retire to bed, drained mentally and physically, and fall into a restless slumber. Each night I'd awaken to that familiar terror, ending only when my gaze fell upon that friendly, bright screen, tuned to an easy-to-watch sitcom or home improvement show.

"Oh yes," I'd think. "Granite countertops would be lovely." The homeowners would agree, and the decorator would fix everything. Sometimes it was countertops. Sometimes it was a family solving tough issues. In a simple half hour, everything

was okay again. On my curated list of television shows, there was no loss, no desperate loneliness.

Eventually, I found myself comforted by action. My television went dark. I slept, but only after exhausting myself each day. Staying busy became my new consolation.

Then it all stopped.

March 2020 ended my endless distractions. Having teenaged children, sudden unemployment, and the pandemic isolation left me with idle hands. Again, I felt the fear of lost time and loneliness. I craved that consolation and once more I sat into the wee hours of the night alone with my television.

Television is not a genuine source of comfort. Nothing in my whirlwind of cocooning activity truly consoled me. At some point, I needed true consolation. It was time to sit with my thoughts, my fears, my hopes, with me, with God. I learned to be still, and in my stillness, I found peace.

Brighter days are at hand, but dark times still trouble. There are still moments I long to escape my thoughts. Moments of tearful showers and deep anxiety that come and go. Now I am consoled not by vim and vigor, but by placidity and stillness. Now, in the darkest hours of my darkest nights, I sleep.

by Erin Thomas

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

Psalm 51:4-6

The founding father of Presbyterianism and reformed theology is John Calvin. There is an acronym for core “Calvinistic” principles, TULIP. Each letter stands for a different theological principle that scholars developed based on Calvin’s teachings. The first letter of the acronym, T, stands for “Total Depravity.” Yes, it is referring to you and me, the total depravity of humankind. As seminary students, we exaggerated total depravity to be the source of every little drama and mess-up, but in ministry, it’s not a teaching we pastors use often. The total corruption and wickedness of humanity doesn’t preach well.

The Psalmist sounds pretty reformed in this passage, like a good Calvinist. The fifth verse says, “Surely I was sinful at birth.” Then, the next verse says, “You taught me wisdom in that secret place (the womb).” This sounds a lot like another Presbyterian doctrine, infant baptism. Before we are born, we are not only totally depraved, but totally surrounded by God’s grace. There is nothing we can do to earn God’s grace, forgiveness, mercy, or love. God is with us, loving and forgiving us from the very start. This is why we baptize infants.

God’s unending grace is a note in the great symphony of the love story for humankind that we find in the Bible, in Jesus, in the testimony of generations of saints since Jesus. Take heart. Though we experience the confusion, struggle, pain, or violence that comes from creation’s depravity or separation from God, God’s grace goes before and behind us. On the days when it is hard to remember God’s grace and love, may our community remember the baptismal vows we take promising to support and remind one another of God’s love. You do not walk alone down this depraved road. God and so many others go with you, always.

by Rev. Rachel VanKirk Mathews

con·so·la·tion

/ˌkænsəˈlāSH(ə)n/

Learn to pronounce

noun : a person or thing providing comfort to a person who has suffered.

I don't know of many things as consoling or as comforting as a quilt made with love.

by Elise Kalika



Photo of Janet Kalika with quilt

Your Consolations

This is a space to reflect and journal about your week. Think about the ways God's consolation has been present in your life.

Consolation: Cairns Along the Way

- 9 How can young people keep their way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
- 10 With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.
- 11 I treasure your word in my heart,
so that I may not sin against you.
- 12 Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes.
- 13 With my lips I declare
all the ordinances of your mouth.
- 14 I delight in the way of your decrees
as much as in all riches.
- 15 I will meditate on your precepts,
and fix my eyes on your ways.
- 16 I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

Psalm 119.9-16

The past year has been particularly disorienting. Where are we? Where do we go from here? It's pretty clear we don't want to go back where we started! However, some assurance that we are still following the right way would be helpful. In the age of maps on phones and GPS, being lost is more likely an existential experience than a geographical one. Not that there aren't plenty of existential road maps to choose from, but it can be difficult to tell where they lead, if anywhere. The psalmist prays, "do not let me stray..." and commits to fixing his eyes on God's way. The early Christians were described as "followers of the way." Yes, just like the Mandalorian.

My favorite National Park is Acadia. Stone cairns aren't unique to Acadia, but they have this unique shape that helps direct you along your way. You can imagine that if you were tiny, you could pass through the archway, pointing you in the correct direction. In the thick fog that can envelope the park, this extra bit of guidance can be very helpful and serve to reassure you that you are headed in the right direction. My experience has been that doing the things that Christ taught (repenting, forgiving others, showing kindness and mercy, having patience, and so forth) will often get you pointed in the right direction again. Progress might be slow, you might not know exactly where you are, but at least you know you're back on track. As you think about your own faith journey, can you think of who or what God has provided you direction along the way?

By Rev. Matt Falco



The Valley of Humiliation

Lord Jesus
who rode into the city of man
before the stares of your enemies
and the shouts of your friends...
Grant me to gaze into your eyes
that my easy praise of you may be stilled
and my capacity to deny and betray be acknowledged
that in silence
my stony heart be polished up
in humiliation and hope...
Let this day find me vulnerable
as you were vulnerable
that rejection may not devastate me
nor defeat destroy me
but strip me of all pretension
and grid me with truth...
As you were gentle
with the strength of one
who confidence was rooted in God alone
so grant me such strength in your purpose
that I be not swayed by the praise of men
to overwhelmed by their blame
nor swerved by pleasure of profit
from the way of your judgment
in me and for me...
As you wept over the city of your fathers
because they wouldn't admit its injustice
grant me to weep over the city of my fathers
for those who are powerless
and those who will not exercise their power
but stand aside and say, I wish I could help
but I can't take leadership because of my position...
Grant me not to be ashamed of your shame
nor to be embarrassed by the taunts of cynics...
Let me walk with you
into the whatever valley of humiliation is to be mine
in the certain hope
that every valley shall be exalted...

Submitted by Douglas Ensminger

Many people find comfort in the hymns and music of the Christian tradition. Each week, we're offering a hymn for you to reflect on. We encourage you to google these hymns and give them a listen... you will find all of them on YouTube and other music platforms. If you find an arrangement you find particularly comforting, share it with your friends. Is the hymn new to you? Is it an old favorite? What, if anything, about the hymn do you find consoling? The tune? The words? The memories it conjures? The promises made in the hymn? Does it inspire you to think or feel differently about your day?

How Firm a Foundation

It seems odd now to think of singing this text to the tune ADESTE FIDELIS (think O Come, All Ye Faithful), but mainline churches did so well into the 20th century because of a cultural bias against shape note music. The vigor of the present tune seems especially right for the final line's reference to Hebrews 13:5.

1 How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in God's excellent Word!
What more can be said than to you God hath said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

2 "Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
for I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

3 "When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
for I will be near thee, thy troubles to bless,
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

4 "When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

5 "The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."

After the Winter, God Sends the Spring

by Helen Steiner Rice

Springtime is a season
Of hope and joy and cheer.
There's beauty all around us
To see and touch and hear.
So, no matter how downhearted
And discouraged we may be,
New hope is born when we behold
Leaves on a budding tree,
Or when we see a timid flower
Push through the frozen sod
And open wide in glad surprise
Its petaled eyes to God,
For this is just God saying,
“Lift up your eyes to Me,
And the bleakness of your spirit,
Like the budding Springtime tree,
Will lose its wintry darkness
And your heavy heart will sing” –
For God never sends the Winter
Without the joy of Spring.



Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
God's love endures forever.

Let Israel say:

“His love endures forever.”

Psalm 118:1-2

“Forever and ever, amen.” That song lyric is from a country song from the late 1980's. It's a classic that never seems to leave country radio. I grew up in Alabama. My mother lived almost her whole life in the small town of Athens. Both sets of her grandparents made their lives in Jackson, Mississippi. Being from the South is complicated. Alabama and Mississippi play especially painful parts in America's story. The 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, the march from Montgomery to Selma, the Montgomery bus boycott, the Letter from the Birmingham Jail, all in the most well-known civil rights moments for their violence and impact.

As I'm growing older, I'm learning what loving my birthplace can mean. Instead of shame or embarrassment, my love of my home can be honesty about who we are and hope for an ever more healthy state. Is God's love like this? Does God love us in a way that hopes the best for us no matter the past or the present? Is God actively working with us for our growth? When I think of the story of the Hebrew people, it is not a straight path of growth. There are ups and downs, switchbacks, and detours along their journey. It is the same for us as individuals and collective groups- a church, country, humankind. Our lives wind and twist as we experience things we did not expect, grow as a result of knowing new and different people, and so much else of life that can seem chaotic. It is hard to see God loving and working for the better through the unexpected and the chaos. But, be assured, the God who is beyond time, never abandons you or any bit of creation along the way. May the arc of creation continue to bend towards health and wholeness. Let us have hope in God's mercy and grace together.

by Rev. Rachel VanKirk Mathews

We all go through difficult times in our lives; it is not a matter of ‘if’, it is a matter of ‘when’. In the Church calendar, Lent is the introspective time symbolizing the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness fasting. We observe Lent every year, leading up to the Easter celebration. Yet, it is a somber, sober time for reflection, for being in the ‘wilderness’. Why do we feel it necessary to do this every year? To go into the ‘wilderness’ willingly? I suggest that we choose to be in the wilderness to practice being there. We need to practice and prepare, so when the time comes, we are more prepared to know what to do.

In Katherine May’s recent book, *Wintering*, she describes the cycle of the seasons. While the seasons of nature do not always mirror the ‘seasons’ of our lives, they do remind us that seasons are cyclical. Early in the book, she illustrates nature in preparing for winter: “Plants and animals don’t fight the winter; they don’t pretend it’s not happening and attempt to carry on living the same lives they had in the summer. They prepare. They adapt. They perform extraordinary acts of metamorphosis to get them through. Winter is a time of withdrawing from the world, maximizing scant resources, carrying out acts of brutal efficiency and vanishing from sight; but that is where the transformation occurs. Winter is not the death of the life cycle, but its crucible.”

In Lent, we don’t pretend that Good Friday isn’t coming, that the isolation in the wilderness isn’t real. We must practice metamorphosis; our lives will not be the same. We prepare for the grief, for the death, also knowing that Easter and new life are on the other side. Indeed, spring is only possible because of winter; the joy of Easter morning because of Good Friday.

by Carol Jordan

On the outskirts of Jerusalem
the donkey waited.
Not especially brave, or filled with understanding,
he stood and waited.

How horses, turned out into the meadow,
leap with delight!
How doves, released from their cages,
clatter away, splashed with sunlight.

But the donkey, tied to a tree as usual, waited.
Then he let himself be led away.
Then he let the stranger mount.

Never had he seen such crowds!
And I wonder if he at all imagined what was to happen.
Still, he was what he had always been: small, dark, obedient.

I hope, finally, he felt brave.
I hope, finally, he loved the man who rode so lightly upon him,
as he lifted one dusty hoof and stepped, as he had to, forward.

excerpt by Mary Oliver from her book *Thirst*

Consolation: God Is Good

- 5 Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
- 6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.
- 7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- 8 They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
- 9 For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.
- 10 O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!
- 11 Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me,
or the hand of the wicked drive me away.

Psalm 36.5-11

On this Monday of Holy Week, the psalm reminds us that God's loving purposes are intended for all, for God will "save humans and animals alike... how precious is your steadfast love, O God." The message of the greatness of God's steadfast love is overwhelming. The heights of heaven. The depths of the deep. The shelter of the wings. The river of delights. The fountain of life. The light of light. Maybe you remember singing this as a child...

God is so good. God is so good. God's so good to me.

As we press on towards Good Friday, we witness the depths of God's love. God's willingness to be present even in the midst of our greatest suffering. Immanuel. God with us. God en-

fleshed... a body that cannot just be set aside when not needed anymore. It's only through the humanness of Jesus Christ that we can fully know who this God is and what it means that she is good. The concreteness of Jesus means that the goodness of God isn't just an abstract or transcendent reality, but something that we are meant to experience here and now. Our experience of divine goodness - God's consolation - doesn't exist in a vacuum, but in bread broken and meal shared. In the cleansing of the waters of life. In healing touch. In human forgiveness and reconciliation. Even in dying on a cross. The greatest measure of God's goodness and what we will celebrate on Easter morning is that in Jesus, God puts death's dark shadow to flight. This Holy Week, may the words of Psalm 36.11 be your prayer... "Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me, or the hand of the wicked drive me away."



We weep for the wretched expressions of all things that were first built of goodness and glory, but now are their own shadow twins.

We have wept so often.
And we will weep again.

And yet, there is somewhere in our tears
A hope still kept.

We feel it in this darkness,
Like a tiny flame,
When we are told

Jesus also wept.

You wept.

So moved by the pain of this crushes creation, you,
O Lord, heaved with the grief of it, drinking the anguish like
water
And sweating it out of your skin like blood.

Is it possible that you - in your sadness over Lazarus,
In your grieving for Jerusalem, in your sorrow in the garden -
Is it possible that you have sanctified out weeping too?

For the grief of God is no small thing,
And the weeping of God is not without effect.
The tears of Jesus preceded a resurrection of the dead.

O Spirit of God, is it then possible that our tears,
Might also be a kind of intercession?

That we, your children, in our groaning
 With the sadness of creation, could
 Be joining in some burdened work of coming restoration?
 Is it possible that when we weep and don't know why,
 It is because the curse has ranged so far, so wide?
 That we weep at that which breaks your heart, because
 It has also broken ours - sometimes so deeply that
 We cannot explain our weeping,
 Even to ourselves?

If that is true, then let such weeping be received, O Lord,
 As an intercession newly forged of holy sorrow.
 Then let our tears anoint these broken things,
 And let our tears anoint these broken things,
 And let our grief as their consecration -
 A preparation for their promised redemption,
 Our sorrow sealing them from that day when
 You will take the ache of all creation,
 And turn it inside-out,
 Like the shedding of an old gardener's glove.

O Lord, if it pleases you,
 When your children weep but don't know why,
 Yet use our tears to baptize what you love.

Amen.

A liturgy for those who Weep Without Knowing Why
 from "Every Moment Holy"

Many people find comfort in the hymns and music of the Christian tradition. Each week, we're offering a hymn for you to reflect on. We encourage you to google these hymns and give them a listen... you will find all of them on YouTube and other music platforms. If you find an arrangement you find particularly comforting, share it with your friends. Is the hymn new to you? Is it an old favorite? What, if anything, about the hymn do you find consoling? The tune? The words? The memories it conjures? The promises made in the hymn? Does it inspire you to think or feel differently about your day?

His Eye is On the Sparrow (Why Should I Feel Discouraged)

This hymn based on Jesus' saying about God's care for all creatures (Matthew 10:29–30/Luke 12:6–7) began with the refrain's last line, inspired by a woman who had endured much illness. It was first sung in public at the Royal Albert Hall, London, during evangelistic services in 1905.

1 Why should I feel discouraged?
Why should the shadows come?
Why should my heart be lonely
and long for heaven and home,
when Jesus is my portion?
My constant friend is he:
his eye is on the sparrow,
and I know he watches me;
his eye is on the sparrow,
and I know he watches me.

Refrain:

I sing because I'm happy, (I'm happy)
 I sing because I'm free, (I'm free)
 for his eye is on the sparrow,
 and I know he watches me.

2 "Let not your heart be troubled,"
 his tender word I hear,
 and resting on his goodness,
 I lose my doubts and fears;
 though by the path he leadeth
 but one step I may see:
 his eye is on the sparrow,
 and I know he watches me;
 his eye is on the sparrow,
 and I know he watches me. (Refrain)

3 Whenever I am tempted,
 whenever clouds arise,
 when song gives place to sighing,
 when hope within me dies,
 I draw the closer to him,
 from care he sets me free:
 his eye is on the sparrow,
 and I know he watches me;
 his eye is on the sparrow,
 and I know he watches me. (Refrain)

Maundy Thursday

Here is the source of every sacrament,
The all-transforming presence of the Lord,
Replenishing our every element
Remaking us in his creative Word.
For here the earth herself gives bread and wine,
The air delights to bear his Spirit's speech,
The fire dances where the candles shine,
The waters cleanse us with His gentle touch.
And here He shows the full extent of love
To us whose love is always incomplete,
In vain we search the heavens high above,
The God of love is kneeling at our feet.
Though we betray Him, though it is the night.
He meets us here and loves us into light.

by poet Malcom Guite

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

Psalm 22:1-5



This painting by Hannah Garrity is of Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus, a story told in Luke, chapter 23. Joseph was a part of the Jewish council who turned against Jesus, but the Scripture says Joseph was against their actions. After Jesus' death, Joseph asked for Jesus' body from the Romans who executed him. Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in linen and placed him in a tomb that he provided.

Jesus cries out the words from the Psalm above as he is dying on the cross, dying in an incredibly brutal way. The image and sensory feelings of Joseph holding Jesus' body, tending to his body with cloth and fragrance, and burying his body make real and relatable Jesus' harsh death. Forsaken, in pain, dying, such hard realities of human life.

Meditate on the image of Jesus' body in Joseph's arms. God be with us this day as you were surely with Jesus through his suffering.

by Rev. Rachel VanKirk Mathews

Healing

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
We enjoin your divine mercies.
Lord, why do we suffer?
Why do we hurt?
Shall our only answer
Be the eternal abyss of the cosmos?
Shall our only answer be the whirlwind of unknowing
Which engulfed Job?
Why do the wicked flourish,
While the righteous waste away?
I am left speechless, left with the words,
“I will trust in you, my God.”

God, we ask for the sending of your healing Spirit,
Which came to us through Jesus,
as he breathed upon his disciples.
This Spirit gathered in your people,
To be warmed by the fire of divine presence.
Around this warmth may we
Be healed and taken into your care.

Like the blind man whom Jesus healed,
May we become a sign
of your glory, calling you the Anointed One,
The one who also anoints us and points us to the Love of God.
Grants us your healing peace, Amen.

Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

Mark 16.4-5

Our season of reflection on the theme of consolation comes to a close with these words of Mark. “...they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.” I wonder what stone might be blocking you from believing in the gift of the resurrection. What if that stone was suddenly lifted for you? All along you thought it was some hurdle of faith that you had to overcome on your own, but now you discover that the heavy lifting has been done. Who did this for you? Who has forgiven you unexpectedly or undeservedly? Who has shared their abundance with you even though there was no way you could have earned it? Who helped clothe you with the dignity of your full humanity by recognizing that you are indeed, despite any imagined evidence to the contrary, a beloved child of God? Who nurtured and fed you because they saw the deep hunger that only God could fill? The stone has been rolled away for you: the only thing standing in the way is yourself.

Take heart and believe the good news: Christ is risen.

Happy Easter!

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