



Lenten Devotional

We hope you'll follow along daily, be deepened in your faith through the words of your brothers and sisters in Christ, and prepare your heart to celebrate at Easter the new life he made possible for all.

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2018

The Rev. Mark Tidd, Interim Pastor, Little Falls Presbyterian Church, Arlington, Va. / Doctor of Ministry Reformed Focus Student

SCRIPTURE

Luke 18:9-14

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus directs his words to unnamed listeners who were far from what the prophet Micah said the Lord expected: "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). The fasting and tithing of the Pharisee in the parable was contradicted by his arrogance, whereas the tax collector felt profoundly his deep need for God. While it's obvious who our model should be, it can perhaps be tempting to reassure ourselves that we are not like "those Pharisees"—and perhaps to take just a little pride in our humility.

Then comes Ash Wednesday, and with it the words of the liturgy: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return; repent, and believe in the gospel." We have the obligation and the opportunity to confess our sinfulness and to cry with the tax collector, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" We receive the cross-shaped mark of ashes on our foreheads as an intimate sign that all we can do is accept our dependence on the mercy of God. And we just might recognize that the mercy of God is enough, and is reason enough for deep thanksgiving and joy.

May we give thanks to God on this Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent for the mercy shown to us in Jesus as we prepare our hearts to observe the shattering goodness of Good Friday and the astounding goodness of Easter.

PRAYER

God of grace and mercy, grant us the true humility that abandons pretense about our own righteousness. Enable us

to repent truly and to believe your Good News with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2018

The Rev. Eric McIntosh '12, Priest in Charge, St. James Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pa. / PTS Alumnaeli Council Member

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 3:12-21

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. 16 Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. 17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

DEVOTIONAL

Do you ever get tired of being tired? I do! I am tired of fighting every day of my life. I see racism every day, and I am tired of it. I see misogyny almost just as often, and I am tired of it. The stock market keeps rising, but my paycheck does not, nor do the paychecks of my friends. My kids and their friends may never do better than their parents because of having to take out huge student loans. The sheer weight of all that I have to negotiate because of the oppressive actions of would-be enemies of the cross makes me tired. Emotionally speaking, it feels like the evildoers are getting away with it.

But I am tired of being tired! And I hear God telling me, "Then give up being tired! After all, their end is destruction. Besides, this isn't your home anyway; your citizenship is in heaven, and this ain't heaven yet!" So this Lenten season, instead of continuing to be tired of being tired, I am pressing on! I am putting the troubles behind me and pressing on! I am putting the pain behind me as best I can and am

pressing on! With God's help, I am forgetting the hate that lies behind me and I am pressing on! I am pressing on with expectant anticipation that the Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, will transform this body of humiliation! This year for Lent, I am just tired enough to give up being tired. I am giving it all to God, and I am pressing on toward His glory!

PRAYER

Lord God almighty, many of us are just fatigued beyond hope. Many of us do not know where to go or what to do. Help us to be honest with you. Remind us to turn to you. Call us as loudly as you can to press toward our Savior, Jesus, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever! Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Sterling '88/'98, Pastor, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Allison Park, Pa. / Field Education Supervisor

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 4:1-9

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

DEVOTIONAL

Wouldn't it be something if Christian believers purposed to live a life of "passionate gratitude"? The expression "with thanksgiving" (v. 6) is meant to be more than an add-on in this text, I believe, and it follows the phrase "in everything." I'll bet you have had lots of blessings in your life for which it was easy to be thankful. But what about the things that, at least initially, were not perceived as "blessings" at all? Verse 6 says "in everything," doesn't it?

The author of Philippians suggests that approaching God with a thankful attitude makes a difference. Maybe God grooves on hearing us being grateful, even as we come with our "laundry lists" of prayer requests. What if gratitude had nothing to do with whether we had a reason to be grateful? I am thankful for my partner of 40-plus years, always, regardless of whether she gives me reason in the moment. And my "passion" for her means that I regularly tell her just how thankful I am. I think she really likes it. Maybe God does, too?

Developing a perpetually thankful heart is a win-win-win situation: God likes it, it makes us feel really good, and others are blessed by it and respond favorably to it. Only being thankful when something positive happens is lame. Passionate gratitude "in everything" makes a powerful witness, dear ones!

PRAYER

Dear God, I thank you. I just thank you! Help me develop a truly thankful heart and a passion for gratitude, not just toward you, but around others as well. Teach me the joy and power of giving thanks in everything. In Jesus' name, amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2018

Christin Thorpe, PTS Fellows and Community Engagement Coordinator for the Metro-Urban Institute

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 4:10-20

10 I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. 11 Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me. 14 In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. 15 You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. 16 For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. 18 I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

DEVOTIONAL

In our reading for today, Paul is writing his thanks to the Philippians for their concern and generosity toward him during his time of distress. Paul explains that although the Philippians' actions benefitted him, more importantly, they were pleasing to God. Because their actions were pleasing to God, they could trust God to provide all their needs. But their needs would not merely be met—they would be met according to God's riches in glory in Christ Jesus. In other words, their needs would be met in a measure far greater than any gift they could ever provide to Paul!

This knowledge of God's ability to meet all our needs may be the reason Paul specifies that although he is grateful for their gifts, he doesn't really need them. He has learned to be content with whatever his condition is, whether he has plenty or little. Maybe this contentment stems from his willingness to do the work God has called him to do freely and generously. As a result of Paul's obedience to God, he can state confidently that God will provide his needs far beyond any human gift ever given.

In this Lenten season of self-examination, we should ask ourselves: How can I live a generous life that is pleasing to God and His people? Have I found contentment in whatever I have by resting on the promise that God will fully satisfy every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus?

PRAYER

Gracious God, we thank you for your generosity toward us. Remind us that our generous acts could never compare to the generosity you show us when you are well pleased. Help us remain obedient to your work and find contentment in all situations. Restore our faith in our ability to do all things through Christ, who strengthens us.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Heather Vacek, PTS Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty and Associate Professor of Church History

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 9:3-10

3 Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. 6 We have not listened to

your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. 7 "Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. 8 Open shame, O LORD, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. 9 To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, 10 and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

DEVOTIONAL

The annual journey through Lent draws us into a time of contemplation. We are invited to think deeply about God, ourselves, and our communities. Such reflections will likely surface reasons for despair and reasons for hope. In these verses from the prophet Daniel, we find honesty about individual and collective wrongdoing ("we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances") and the shame that followed. Daniel's confession, however, is preceded and followed by affirmation of God's steadfast love, love that is not deterred or diminished by human action. Shame does not drive the prophet away from God; rather, it prompts his plea for the mercy and forgiveness that belong to God. The prophet trusts that God is a God of mercy and forgiveness, despite human rebellion.

Lent provides time for contemplation, time for "fasting, sackcloth, ashes"—or whatever our modern equivalent of those disciplines might be. As we mourn our individual and collective disobedience and seek to live more fully and faithfully into God's covenant, we do so knowing that we are bound to a community of believers who profess the realities of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. This community of believers—past and present—helps us offer honest confessions of wrongdoing. It also helps us name the never-ending hope grounded in God's steadfast love, mercy, and forgiveness.

PRAYER

Gracious and steadfast God, in this season of contemplation and reflection, we offer thanks for your unrelenting presence with us. Surround us with the gift of an honest community with whom we can confess our turning away and alongside whom we can continually recommit to embracing your love. Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2018

*The Rev. Jay Howell, Memphis, Tenn. / Doctor of Ministry
Reformed Focus Student*

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 1:1-19

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12 What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. 18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

DEVOTIONAL

The church should be united, but it isn't. Here in 1 Corinthians Paul directly describes and denounces the contours of division. The church in Corinth has apparently drawn dividing lines according to those by whom different sects of the church have either been baptized or been taught—for example, Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (v. 12).

These divisions are simply not compatible with the calling of the church. They were wrong then, and they are wrong now. Instead of Paul or Apollos or Cephas, we insert labels like "Presbyterian" or "Lutheran" or "Roman Catholic" or "Evangelical" or "Progressive." Categories of understanding a branch of Christian heritage may have their place, but when those labels supplant the primacy of our collective identity as the body of Christ and instead result in tribal sniping and competition, we must remember anew Paul's question, "Has Christ been divided?" (v. 13).

Lent of course is a season of repentance. Have we for too long overlooked the sin of division within the church? Are we in need of repentance of it? How many of us have quietly resented the fact that a congregation whose theology does match our own grows and flourishes? How many of us have been silently pleased when such a congregation hits upon hard times? Such mentalities are not compatible with Paul's appeal, "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," to be "united in the same mind and the same purpose" (v. 10).

PRAYER

God of Unity, we confess to you our indifference to division and our complicity in it. By your Spirit, we pray, convict us of this sinfulness, and bind our hearts closer to yours in the unity in the gospel. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2018

*The Rev. Dr. Don Ewing '72/'81, Parish Associate, Oakmont
Presbyterian Church, Oakmont, Pa. / PTS Alumnae/i Council
Member*

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 37:12-24

12 Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." 14 So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. He came to Shechem, 15 and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" 16 "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." 17 The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. 18 They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and

we shall see what will become of his dreams.” 21 But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” 22 Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; 24 and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

DEVOTIONAL

Young, bright, his father’s favorite, not sure of what life will bring but only that it will be great, he heads off on an errand—and so begins the story of Joseph. The story is very personal. We love the story and even as we read it we are pulling for Joseph, for we remember all that has happened before in his dreams. We read quickly through the brothers’ jealousy, for we know jealousy never leads to anything worthwhile. We read through their jealousy with great anticipation of how God will extract Joseph from this terrible situation and bring about God’s dream of a nation.

We can identify with that pattern (dream, kicked to the curb, restoration), for it is not unlike our own story, or the story of our family. The youthful dive into life includes dreams, like those for career and family. Starting out, we anticipate great things, new things. We aren’t exactly certain how they will happen, but the future looks bright. Then suddenly . . . we get thrown into a pit of many sizes and shapes—loss of income, job termination, medical issues, aging-parent concerns, emotional grief and loss. It can go on. Like Joseph at the bottom of his pit, we wonder not how is God going to get us out of this mess, but *whether* God is going to get us out.

Then comes grace—we are shown a way out of our pit. And looking back we wonder how we could have doubted God. Where was our faith? Where is our faith? In this season we look back at the pits we have been thrown into, and we give thanks for the grace that has raised us then and will continue to do so through faith.

PRAYER

O Lord of light and darkness, of mountain tops and deep abyss, open our eyes and hearts to your grace shown to us in the past and awaiting us in our future. We pray that the darkness and depth of the pits we are thrown into would not only turn us to You in trust but also remind us of your power to redeem, and your joy in doing so. In hope and with joy we lift to you our lives in the knowledge of your sure grace and love through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2018

*The Rev. Kimberly Greway, Chief Operating Officer,
Foundation of HOPE / Director of Chaplaincy Services,
Allegheny County Jail, Pittsburgh, Pa. / Doctor of Ministry
Parish Ministry Focus Student*

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 5

- 1 Give ear to my words, O LORD;
give heed to my sighing.
- 2 Listen to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.
- 3 O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.
- 4 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil will not sojourn with you.
- 5 The boastful will not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.
- 6 You destroy those who speak lies;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.
- 7 But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house,
I will bow down toward your holy temple
in awe of you.
- 8 Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.
- 9 For there is no truth in their mouths;
their hearts are destruction;
their throats are open graves;
they flatter with their tongues.
- 10 Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of their many transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.
- 11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them,
so that those who love your name may exult in you.
- 12 For you bless the righteous, O LORD;
you cover them with favor as with a shield.

DEVOTIONAL

One of the hardest books of the Bible for me to read is the Psalter. It is not difficult because of its poetic language and structure or because of its symbolism and allusion. In fact, those attributes make it one of my favorite books; rather, the Psalter is difficult for me to read because I can’t help singing the songs that are drawn from it when I come upon those passages. I might be happily reading or praying a psalm when suddenly a verse leads me into a well-known song. The melody plays in my mind and the words of the song, rather

than the psalm, drift into my consciousness. The music takes me to a place that I didn't intend when I began reading. Often the experience deeply enriches the reading.

When I read verse 8 of Psalm 5, the words and music of Samuel Wesley, grandson of hymn writer Charles Wesley, waft into my mind:

*Lead me, Lord, lead me in thy righteousness,
make thy way plain before my face.
For it is thou, Lord, thou, Lord only,
that makest me dwell in safety.*

The repetition of "thou, Lord only" in the song emphasizes the uniqueness of the Lord's protection. The drawn-out syllables in "safety" settle us securely in a protective shelter. Rather than detracting from the psalm, these elements of the song complement the psalmist's themes and enhance the experience of reading or praying. So, this Lent, let us find our refuge in God and ever sing for joy!

PRAYER

Protector God,
Who straightens our paths and harkens to our cries:
Hear our words,
Heed our sighings,
Hide us from our enemies,
That we may take refuge in you
and rejoice in your protection with songs and exultations;
Through Jesus Christ the Crucified,
Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2018

*The Rev. Mark Whitsel '04, Pastor, Pleasant Hills Community
Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa. / Doctor of Ministry
Christian Spirituality Focus Student*

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15

2:14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. 3:1 And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according

to human inclinations? 4 For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. 9 For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. 14 If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

DEVOTIONAL

Why is it so important that Paul explains the importance of unity within the Church? Is he really concerned to press upon these early Christian believers, who are like children, the importance of getting along? While getting along seems rather trivial in the sweeping narrative of Christ's Kingdom-ushering death and resurrection, such a lesson appears to be foundational for how the Church understands itself—both as individuals and as a whole. Here Paul reminds the church (and her leaders!) that our work—our efforts—are, in the final analysis, not ours at all. They are part of a broader work that God is doing within His people. To recognize this truth is to give oneself over to a more unified vision of the Church. Clearly the church in Corinth was struggling with this very issue.

Throughout the years, I've witnessed how easily the Church at any level can fall into such behavior or thinking. We pick our people, set up shop, and build our silos. We've all seen it happen. Especially those in leadership should remember that we are not immune to this tendency. Consider the temptation for Paul and Apollos to feed into the cult of personality developing before them. How easily one could succumb to such allure! But Paul reminds us that "we are God's servants, working together," building on the one "foundation," who is Christ. For a leader, keeping a clear light of sight on this truth is always to the benefit of the people of God!

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, today we thank You for Your call into the Church through the death of Jesus Christ. As we go about the hard work of leadership, guide us in paths of clarity, unity, and humility. May we model and mirror the gospel faithfully. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Kenneth J. Woo, PTS Assistant Professor of Church History

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 18 Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." 21 So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

DEVOTIONAL

Self-awareness is empowering. This is the lesson the Apostle put before the church at Corinth: Do you not know who you are? The Corinthians are holy, set apart. The point? God is with you and for you. To press this point, Paul makes several lofty claims: "You are God's temple . . . God's Spirit dwells in you . . . You belong to Christ . . . All things are yours." Self-awareness, in this case, meant freedom from attempts to impose identity, priorities, and strategies contrary to God's mission. It's freedom to resist. To be different. Why? God is with you.

Self-awareness is empowering, but it's also dangerous. Because self-deception is easy. Rather than resisting cultural markers of success that separate winners from losers, the Corinthians embraced them. They confused them with God's power. Similar opportunities for self-deception abound today. "All things are yours"—God is with you—quickly becomes license to seize the levers of political advantage, grasp after wealth and prestige, boast at another's expense. We trade security in God's presence for the insecurity of needing to prove God's presence with us by winning.

Making ourselves great seems prudent enough, but it's not the gospel. In Christ, God's power is revealed in setting aside glory, defying expectations. The gospel surprises. It subverts. God doesn't conform to business as usual. Neither should we. Do not be deceived. In the face of injustice perpetuated by insecurity, resistance requires self-awareness, even self-denial. Dare to defy expectations. How? God is with us, we belong to Christ, God's Spirit dwells in us.

PRAYER

Gracious God, when our eyes—and the eyes of our hearts—deceive us, show us the futility of securing ourselves by ensuring we always side with the winners. Teach us to resist false power, to live differently as those confident in the promise that Christ has sided with us. Amen.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2018

Lisa Bunting, PTS Event Coordinator and Receptionist

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 4:1-7

1 Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. 4 I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God. 6 I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, "Nothing beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. 7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

DEVOTIONAL

In this scripture, we are reminded that everything we have, do, and accomplish is not achieved solely by our own doing but is, in fact, a precious gift bestowed on us by the grace of God. Paul says, "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" God's gifts are all-encompassing in our lives and give us the strength to achieve all things. We should keep a humble spirit and not boast; we should also keep a gracious heart to acknowledge the gifts God has graciously bestowed on

us. In the same way, we would not receive a present from a friend or family member and behave as though we bought it for ourselves; rather, we would be grateful, thankful, and appreciative that our friend or family member generously provided us with a gift. We should follow this example in our everyday lives, since it is God's grace that sustains us. God is the source of strength in our lives and intervenes in our behalf—God always shows up strong and mighty. During this Lenten season, we should examine ourselves to see whether we have a gracious heart and a humble spirit. We should also give thanks to God for all the strength we have been provided and all the gifts we have been given.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, first, we thank you for all the gifts you have lovingly and graciously bestowed on us. Help us not to take them for granted, but instead, to continuously acknowledge your love. We also ask that you humble us, so that we do not become consumed with our own ego and pride but, rather, maintain a modest heart and spirit. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2018

The Rev. Charissa Howe '14/'16, Pastor, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Sewickley, Pa., and Emsworth Presbyterian Church, Emsworth, Pa. / Field Education Supervisor

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 41:14–45

14 Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. 15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." 16 Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." 17 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; 18 and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass. 19 Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt. 20 The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows, 21 but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke. 22 I fell asleep a second time and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk, 23 and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them; 24 and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who

could explain it to me." 25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. 27 The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine. 28 It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 29 There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. 30 After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land. 31 The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous. 32 And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about. 33 Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years. 35 Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. 36 That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine." 37 The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants. 38 Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?" 39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." 41 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." 42 Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck. 43 He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44 Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45 Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

DEVOTIONAL

When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream, he was not being called to do something new. He'd done it before. This wasn't even the first time he'd done it right. The first time he'd done it right, it got him into some seriously hot water. His brothers didn't appreciate that previous interpretation, nor were they fond of their father's favor of Joseph. As a result, they shipped him off to Egypt in the hands of slave traders and acted as though he were dead.

I wouldn't blame Joseph if he'd just packed it in right there. "That's it! I'm not interpreting any more dreams. It's not worth the trouble!" What courage it must have taken for Joseph to continue to interpret dreams for those around him—to help others see what it was God was speaking to them through their dreams. And yet, he continued.

Here we see that, in spite of the trouble that speaking God's word to others caused for Joseph early on, eventually he was recognized for it. Eventually, it bore clear fruit and made a huge difference. In fact, had he not warned Pharaoh of the coming famine, Joseph's own brothers who had betrayed him would have starved. What strange but wonderful ways God works in through our courage!

PRAYER

God of all, thank you for the way you speak in our lives. Make me a vessel of your Word, so that, through my courage and willingness to speak up, others' lives might be touched by you and changed. Grant me the strength to speak your Word, even when it's difficult or unpopular.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2018

The Rev. Joseph Hedden '97, Pastor, Emmanuel Reformed (Hill's) Church of the United Church of Christ, Export, Pa. / PTS Alumnae/i Council Member

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 4:8-21

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you! 9 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. 10 We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. 11 To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, 12 and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; 13 when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. 14 I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. 17 For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. 18 But some of you, thinking that I am not

coming to you, have become arrogant. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. 21 What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

DEVOTIONAL

I have often wondered about the church in Corinth. Why would anyone want to minister there? The congregation is divided along class lines and is split into factions. Sexual immorality is prevalent. People are suing each other. Pretty much any conflict you can think of grows in the Corinthian soil!

Paul's frustration with the whole situation flows over into his sarcastic tone. He rightly names their arrogance. He writes, in effect, that their 'talk is cheap' (verses 20 and 21). He diagnoses their conflict.

Yet, diagnosis is not enough—not then, and not today. How does one heal from this disease? In marked contrast to the talkers of Corinth, Paul demonstrates that the gospel must be embodied and practiced. If the gospel is to mean anything, it must bear fruit as a counter-witness to the conflict of Corinth. "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly" (verses 12-13).

The raw materials that make for conflict are a given in the human condition. When we are wounded, we are tempted to lash out. When the congregation and its pastor are most stressed, we automatically look for scapegoats, exit plans, and so on. We react out of base instinct, rather than live up to our professed values. That's not a rationalization for bad behavior; it's a fact of life. Paul calls us to look to the values of Jesus Christ as examples of new ways of living and new ways of dealing with conflict.

PRAYER

O God, we know too well what conflict looks like. We have witnessed it. We have contributed to it. Help us to confess our sinful attitudes and to live lives of repentance. Give us the grace to embody the gospel values that make for peace. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2018

The Rev. Buena Smith Dudley, Founder, Transformative Justice, Equity & Empowerment Initiative and AALC Communications Coordinator, Monroeville, Pa. / Doctor of Ministry Urban Change Focus Student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 91

- 1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
- 2 will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."
- 3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
- 4 he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
- 5 You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
6 or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
- 7 A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
- 8 You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.
- 9 Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,
10 no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.
- 11 For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
- 12 On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
- 13 You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under
foot.
- 14 Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
- 15 When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
- 16 With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

DEVOTIONAL

All humankind cries out for help in our most desperate situations. When we face circumstances that render us helpless, our reflex response is to reach beyond our inadequacy, beyond our helplessness, and beyond the ineffectual power of humankind. Whether destitute, ill, or in need of emotional support, we recognize that God and God alone rotates the universe and remains in full control. Hence,

we who love God choose to trust in the faithfulness of our Lord.

Psalm 91 reminds us of God's unfailing promises to all who live by faith. When we trust the Most High from day to day, from moment to moment, God shelters and protects us from human and natural attack. The psalmist tells us God's infinite compassion and care are solely activated by our consistent walk with the Lord.

In this reciprocal relationship we experience God's faithfulness in the details and the dilemmas of our lives. As we abide in the Lord, we have no need to fear the unknown or to faint under threat. Not only will God's faithful receive deliverance and protection, but also God's faithfulness will ensure an answer from on High, divine companionship despite the challenge, rescue from the threat of peril, and honor from the Lord. Ultimately, we find satisfaction and salvation as we rest in God's love.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for being our dwelling place. Though we face an onslaught of trials and terror, remind us of your safety and sustenance that lifts our hearts above our circumstances. Increase our faith as we delight in your presence and trust in your promise.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2018

The Rev. Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13, PTS Director of the Worship Program

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 42:18-28

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here where you are imprisoned. The rest of you shall go and carry grain for the famine of your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they agreed to do so. 21 They said to one another, "Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this anguish has come upon us." 22 Then Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." 23 They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter. 24 He turned away from them and wept; then he returned and spoke to them. And he picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes. 25 Joseph then gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return every man's money to

his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. This was done for them. 26 They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed. 27 When one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money at the top of the sack. 28 He said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in my sack!" At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

DEVOTIONAL

During Lent, we remember that the way of the cross, the way to resurrection, is through death. New life requires a daily surrendering of the old life, a letting go of the present order, so that we may embrace the new humanity. When Joseph saw and heard the brothers who had sold him into slavery, he wept. The weight of it all must have been overwhelming. Moving forward, embracing a new way of living, required Joseph to lay to rest the hurt of his brothers' hatred, the bitterness and resentment over what they had done to him, the longing for the family life that could have been, the pride of having been elevated to a place of power over those from whom he might be tempted to seek revenge. And so he wept.

Sometimes, all we feel we can do is weep. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem, we weep for our own circumstances and for our weary world. When the weight of everything overwhelms us, perhaps all we can do is join our voices with Jesus' from the cross in crying out, "Father, forgive them." Perhaps all we can do is tell God that the weight is too heavy for us, the brokenness of this world too powerful, the pain put upon us too unforgivable. Perhaps all we can do is weep under its weight . . . and then remember that, even now, it is all at the foot of the cross and being pieced back to wholeness through the sacrificed body of Christ—it is being redeemed by the blood of Jesus shed for the forgiveness even of those sins that are too painful for us ourselves to forgive.

PRAYER

Eternal God, forgive us where we have failed to seek reconciliation, where we have sought revenge rather than reunion. By the power of your Spirit, help us to weep for all that breaks your heart. Then, as we trust in your forgiveness and reconciling work, give us the grace to lay to rest the old and live in the newness of life you have brought. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 2018

The Rev. Walt Pietschmann '90, Pastor, Bethesda and Olivet Presbyterian Churches, Elizabeth, Pa. / Field Education Supervisor

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 42:29-38

29 When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, 30 "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us, and charged us with spying on the land. 31 But we said to him, 'We are honest men, we are not spies. 32 We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' 33 Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. 34 Bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will release your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'" 35 As they were emptying their sacks, there in each one's sack was his bag of money. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. 36 And their father Jacob said to them, "I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!" 37 Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." 38 But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should come to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

DEVOTIONAL

The long story between Joseph and his brothers is one that is full of jealousy, hatred, and backstabbing, but also one that is ultimately about forgiveness and redemption. In this section of the story, Joseph has given his brothers food to return to Canaan and has requested that the youngest brother, Benjamin, be brought back to Egypt when the brothers return. Even though the brothers brought money to pay for the food, Joseph has secretly given it back to them. Upon returning to Canaan the brothers tell their father, Jacob, all that has happened. Jacob is beside himself with grief. He doesn't want to let go of Benjamin and thinks he's already lost Joseph and perhaps now Simeon, who has been bound and held for ransom in Egypt.

There is an old saying that "blood is thicker than water," meaning that relationships and loyalties within a family are the strongest and most important ones. Since the beginning of time, however, those ties have served as some of our most

difficult and toxic relationships as well. During this Lenten season, perhaps we need to examine our closest relationships and see how we can turn any difficulty we might have with a brother or sister, mother or father, son or daughter, into a more nourishing relationship. With hope and expectation, we can perhaps allow God to make all things new by turning jealousy and hatred into forgiveness and redemption.

PRAYER

Redemptive God, my relationship with (*friend or relative*) hasn't always been a reflection of Your love for me. Fill my heart with a new spirit of grace and allow opportunities for us to heal our relationship. Forgive me any arrogance or contempt and replace it with hope and joy. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 2018

The Rev. Lois Swestyn '03, United Methodist Elder (retired), Carmichaels, Pa. / PTS Alumnae/i Council Member

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 43:1-15

1 Now the famine was severe in the land. 2 And when they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little more food." 3 But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' 4 If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; 5 but if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'" 6 Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?" 7 They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'" 8 Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy with me, and let us be on our way, so that we may live and not die—you and we and also our little ones. 9 I myself will be surety for him; you can hold me accountable for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. 10 If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice." 11 Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry them down as a present to the man—a little balm and a little honey, gum, resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. 12 Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the top of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. 13 Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; 14 may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, so that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. As for

me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." 15 So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, as well as Benjamin. Then they went on their way down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

DEVOTIONAL

Jacob/Israel, one of the great Patriarchs of the Bible, is not showing his best leadership at this time, but we can learn from his actions. He's in a time of crisis, a famine in the land. Decisions need to be made about purchasing grain. God has already provided grain through Jacob's son Joseph, who is now in Egypt. But for the family to get more needed grain from there, Jacob will have to risk sending along his beloved son Benjamin, Joseph's youngest brother. That's part of the deal Joseph made with his other brothers when they came for grain the first time. Jacob resists sending Benjamin, for much deceit had been played out in this family before. Perhaps understandably, Jacob thought that the less others knew about him, the better off he and his family were.

Many Christians operate on this same principle. They think that keeping others from knowing them well avoids problems. But like Jacob, such people are misled. For it is sin that loves darkness and secrets. Righteousness, on the other hand, loves light and truth. Good communication is a must in all relationships—especially in our relationship with God. And trust is the key.

In this passage we see that Jacob relied on God, but only as a last resort. God had been and would continue to be active in this family's life in times of trouble, famine, and reconciliation. Likewise, God is active at all times in our lives.

Is there a famine in your life today? Are you seeking God for direction? Are you trusting God with all your life?

PRAYER

All knowing God, we thank you for being active in all times of our life. We pray to be drawn closer to you through our honesty with you and others. May we rely on you first in our life and not as a last resort. Help us to recognize the 'famines' in our life and to trust you through every step of the journey to be fed, encouraged, hopeful, and in right relationship with others, especially with you. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 2018

The Rev. Adam M. Davis, Associate Pastor, Thoburn United Methodist Church, St. Clairsville, Ohio / Field Education Supervisor

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 43:16-34

16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, 'Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon.' 17 The man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. 18 Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, 'It is because of the money, replaced in our sacks the first time, that we have been brought in, so that he may have an opportunity to fall upon us, to make slaves of us and take our donkeys.' 19 So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the entrance to the house. 20 They said, 'Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food; 21 and when we came to the lodging-place we opened our sacks, and there was each one's money in the top of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it back with us. 22 Moreover, we have brought down with us additional money to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.' 23 He replied, 'Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money.' Then he brought Simeon out to them. 24 When the steward had brought the men into Joseph's house, and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, 25 they made the present ready for Joseph's coming at noon, for they had heard that they would dine there. 26 When Joseph came home, they brought him the present that they had carried into the house, and bowed to the ground before him. 27 He inquired about their welfare, and said, 'Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?' 28 They said, 'Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.' And they bowed their heads and did obeisance. 29 Then he looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, 'Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!' 30 With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there. 31 Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, 'Serve the meal.' 32 They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. 33 When they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, the men looked at one another in amazement. 34 Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

DEVOTIONAL

This passage from the first book of the Bible details the beautiful reunion of Joseph with his estranged family. In large part, this account is why Joseph is held high before us as a model of biblical forgiveness. In spite of the (beyond) ill treatment Joseph received at the hands of his brothers, not to mention the cascading disasters that followed, Joseph was able to arrive at a place of forgiveness and reconciliation.

What is not highlighted in this particular passage, however, is Joseph's own role in provoking the ire of his brothers, or the ways that Joseph, in turn, tortured his brothers before arriving at this blessed place of reunion. Certainly one can understand the difficulty Joseph would have experienced in encountering his brothers so many years later, with the tables having been turned in the dynamics of their relationship in such a profound way.

So, while we admire Joseph and his willingness to forgive, we look beyond Joseph to Jesus as our model—Jesus, who calls us to turn the other cheek; Jesus, who calls us to bless, heal, and forgive.

PRAYER

Most gracious God, we thank you for those who have modeled for us what it looks like to follow you. Thank you for the many times we have been forgiven. Make us faithful to give as we have received. As we continue to face our own humanity throughout this season, make us your instruments of healing and peace. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 2018

Brenda Henry '17, PTS Metro-Urban Institute Conference Assistant

SCRIPTURE

Romans 8:1-10

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law

- indeed it cannot, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

DEVOTIONAL

In this passage, Paul reminds us of what was at stake when Jesus allowed himself to be sacrificed on the cross—humanity's salvation. Paul makes a distinction between two types of people—the person who is “in Christ Jesus” and the one who “lives according to the flesh”—and their relationship to God. To be “in Christ Jesus” means to be guided by the Spirit of God who dwells within us. To be “in the flesh” is to be hostile to God and refuse to submit to God's commands. Paul was careful to note that humanity's separation from our sinful nature can only be done if the Spirit of Christ dwells in us. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross conquered the nature of sin that held us bound. No longer are we condemned to death; rather we have been made alive through the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

In the face of the many concerns that surrounds us—the ravages of natural storms and disasters, the tension from the threat of nuclear warfare, the strife of social injustices—we are also reminded that we do not have to live and act out of our sinful nature, for we have been freed to act through the Spirit of God that dwells in us. Being set free from the bondage of sin and death, we are called to reflect the Spirit of God within us in all that we do and toward all those whom we encounter. This Lenten season, may we reflect on God's abiding love that has set us free, and may we in turn love and care for others as we ourselves are loved.

PRAYER

Triune God, thank you for the gift of life granted through the death and resurrection of your son Jesus. Thank you for your Spirit that dwells in us and guides us. Lord, may we seek to please you and follow your commands always. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 5, 2018

The Rev. Dr. R. Drew Smith, PTS Professor of Urban Ministry

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 7: 25-31

25 Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. 26 I think that, in view of the impending crisis,

it is well for you to remain as you are. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. 29 I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, 30 and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, 31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

DEVOTIONAL

This passage's focus on eschewing spiritual distractions and social entanglements (including those that may accompany marriage) is perhaps a bit discomfiting to most who encounter it. We may shield ourselves perhaps from the passage's sacrificial demands by rationalizing that it applies only to a selected group of Christians uniquely called to lives of heightened spiritual discipline, self-denial, and service. This group could include, for example, persons devoted to religious sisterhood and monastic priesthood traditions. But confining the passage's applications only to persons who ecclesially (or less formally) devote themselves to this kind of ascetic living would obviate what the passage portends about spiritually consecrated living and service in a broader sense.

Although the scriptures often reference the “few” versus the “many” (as in “many are called, few are chosen” [Matthew 22:14]), such distinctions do not necessarily apply to this passage in 1 Corinthians. It is not simply the few whom the passage beckons into deeper spirituality and service through consecration and sacrifice—it is the many, irrespective of social status or station, profession or livelihood, family structure or marital status.

There is a selflessness written into this passage, but also an urgency—both of which are quite pertinent to the Lenten season. Through crucifixion, Christ “laid down” His life in an act of supreme selflessness to rescue a perishing humanity. As Christ demonstrated so clearly through His life and death, it is in losing ourselves that we find ourselves, it is through emptying ourselves that we become full, and it is through sacrificing ourselves in behalf of others that we show our love for each other and for God (Matthew 10:39; Philippians 2:7; John 15:13). In recalling the meaning of Christ's sacrifice, let us also assess how much of ourselves we are giving to God and to a world of people in peril.

PRAYER

Lord God, in a world preoccupied with self, may we be so giving to others and so surrendered to you that we hold nothing back. Let your words, your ways, your will be entirely

ours. Let us seek you with our whole heart, and let us draw nearer to you through our service to others. Take our lives and consecrate them to you and to the service of your people.

TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2018

The Rev. Susan Blank '15, Director of Pastoral Care, Presbyterian SeniorCare, Oakmont, Pa. / Field Education Supervisor

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 45:1-15

1 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' 12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

DEVOTIONAL

Sibling rivalry has been around a long, long time. In fact, it rears its ugly head on page three of my Bible. Many of us

have experienced struggles with siblings. I was the middle child of seven; there was always someone who was teasing, tattling, or cheating at Monopoly. Often we outgrow sibling rivalries. But in my work as a chaplain, I sometimes encounter the estrangement of those brothers and sisters who have disagreements over the care of their elderly parent. Family bonds can be stretched thin—even broken.

Our scripture passage tells us the story of Joseph, the braggart, the favorite son, sold into slavery by his brothers. Joseph's fortunes rise; his brothers come looking for a handout during a famine. Joseph, once powerless at the bottom of a pit, now has all the power. Will the blood that ties these men together now be spilled upon the ground? After some manipulation and testing of his brothers, Joseph forgives them and provides generously for their needs. Then he sends them back to Canaan to fetch their father. Humorously, Joseph cautions, "Do not quarrel along the way."

Is Joseph a paragon of mercy? Was he able to write off his brothers' crime as a "boyish prank"? Are the ties to their common ancestor that strong? Or was God the primary agent in this drama? Was Joseph able to extend mercy after he himself experienced God's mercy? Was Joseph able to extend grace after he himself received God's grace?.

PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, Open my eyes to see my sin and the signs of your grace. Teach me to be grace-full. Open my heart that I might extend mercy. Open my mind that I might seek forgiveness and that I might give it generously. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7, 2018

The Rev. Andy Greenhow, PTS Special Projects Manager

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1 Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2 Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; 3 but anyone who loves God is known by him. 4 Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." 5 Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. 7 It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some

have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 "Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? 11 So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. 12 But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

DEVOTIONAL

By this point in Lent, I have long given up any observances that have to do with food. I'm back enjoying a glass of beer, eating meat, or chowing down on chocolate. A big part of my justification for doing so goes roughly along the lines of this passage from 1 Corinthians. "I'm free in Christ, justified by faith! I don't need to withhold the pleasure of this steak/wine/ice cream! I'm not spiritually immature like those folks who have to give up food—this vegetarianism has served its purpose and I get it now."

Hey, at least I abandoned my integrity theologically . . .

But maybe the best part of Lent is the sweet relief of not pretending we're mature or advanced in the faith. It's an opportunity to entertain the notion that maybe we are weaker than we thought, that we stumble more readily than we would like to admit. There is freedom in saying, "I need help. I am not where I want to be." And just like the believers living together as the early church, so we, in observing Lent together, get to look out for one another.

I hope we feel free enough to get in touch with our own weakness and lack of knowledge this Lent and, in so doing, grow in compassion for those around us, who are struggling along just like we are.

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for the opportunity in this season to reflect on our weakness and to know more of your power made perfect in weakness. Make us attentive to you and to one another. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2018

Fr. Antony Andrews, Presbyter at St. Mary and St. Antonios Coptic Orthodox Church, Queens, N.Y. / Doctor of Ministry Eastern Christian Focus Student

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34

1 When Israel set out on his journey with all that he had and came to Beer-sheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. 2 God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." 3 Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. 4 I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's own hand shall close your eyes." 5 Then Jacob set out from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. 6 They also took their livestock and the goods that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, 7 his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt. . . . 28 Israel sent Judah ahead to Joseph to lead the way before him into Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen, 29 Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet his father Israel in Goshen. He presented himself to him, fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. 30 Israel said to Joseph, "I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive." 31 Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. 32 The men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.' 33 When Pharaoh calls you, and says, 'What is your occupation?' 34 you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our ancestors'—in order that you may settle in the land of Goshen, because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians."

DEVOTIONAL

Joseph is a type of Christ. As the second-youngest of 12 brothers, Joseph finds that his grandiose dreams and visions cause his brothers to hate him. Their hate is so severe that it ultimately leads them to sell Joseph into slavery and to grieve their father, Jacob, by telling him that Joseph has been killed.

Of course, Joseph is not dead, but like Christ he is betrayed by his own, sold for a sum of silver, and ends up "saving the world." Joseph's revealing of himself to his brothers in Egypt is, for them, a sort of "resurrection" of their brother, thus making Joseph a type of Christ.

Their father Jacob's journeying to Egypt to see Joseph before this son's "own hand shall close [Jacob's] eyes" makes a further parallel between the stories of Joseph and Jesus: The "righteous and devout" Simeon, after seeing the baby Jesus in the Temple, says "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." Both Jacob and Simeon can die in peace after seeing in the flesh God's timely provision for salvation.

The goodness of God is evident in his dealings with Jacob, with Joseph and his brothers, and with us this Lenten season as we experience Christ's giving himself up for the life of the world.

If I ask these questions about the world around me—and I do want to ask them—I then must wonder whether that world might be asking these questions about me! As I look at America, I am awake to the fact that America cannot claim she knows God. Can we who live within her borders claim to know God if we keep silent to that which angers God?

Do I know you God? I do know that I should not fear man, political elections, the new administration, or rising racial tension. But I *should* fear you, Lord! I should fear seeing this prophecy of old be answered on us—and that fear should move me to actions that do not anger but instead *honor* you.

PRAYER

My Lord Jesus Christ, give me the eyes to see your salvation that you have so wonderfully accomplished for me on the tree of the cross. Let me gaze at it as the children of Israel gazed upon the bronze serpent in the wilderness when they were stung with sin. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 9, 2018

The Rev. Kellie Wild '09, IMPACTS Program Director, East End Cooperative Ministries, Pittsburgh, Pa. / Field Education Supervisor

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

16 If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! 17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. 18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel. 19 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made

myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. 24 Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. 25 Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. 26 So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; 27 but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

DEVOTIONAL

It's all about relationships. I work with many people whom some would refer to as the disinherited or those who are marginalized by society. Many of the folks with whom I spend my time do not feel comfortable around Christians or in our churches because they do not feel welcome and accepted. On the other hand, I am often approached by individuals in churches about what they can do to get the people who are marginalized to come into their churches. What I say to these well-intentioned church folk is that people who feel marginalized are not going to come into your churches just because you say your doors are open. Until you are willing to go *out* of the church's doors and engage in building genuine relationships with others, your doors are not open. We need to get to know people and their stories so that we can then share the story of the gospel. I have heard many times over the years that people do not care what you know until they know that you care. You see, we in the church are focused on getting people to come into the church when, like Paul, we need to be going out to the people and speaking to them in a way that shows we care about them as persons. What would it look like if, instead of focusing on getting people into the church, we took the message of the gospel out of the church and to the people?

PRAYER

Gracious God, you speak to each of us in unique ways so that we know of your love for us. Help us to go out of the safety of our churches and into the world to build genuine relationships with those who may not know the message of the gospel so that we may be able to speak and act in ways that allow your love to be shared with others.

SATURDAY, MARCH 10, 2018

Jane Larson '17, Co-leader, Sanctuary Missional Fellowship, Lawrenceville, Pa. / PTS Assistant to the Registrar

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

1 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. 6 Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. 10 And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. 13 No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

DEVOTIONAL

Although writing to a primarily Gentile audience, Paul frames this passage by remembering the ancestors whom Moses led out of slavery in Egypt. These Jewish ancestors became inherited ancestors of the Gentiles through their "ingrafting" into the Hebrews' faith community. Paul acknowledges the unity of all these people through their eating "the same spiritual food" and drinking "the same spiritual drink." More importantly, Paul identifies the spiritual rock, the source of this unity, to be Christ.

As Christ unites the community in Corinth, Paul offers guidance on how to live in community and warns against the mistakes of the past. As a finite people living in a broken world, the Corinthians will inevitably experience trials in striving to maintain this unity. People are coming from diverse backgrounds and social locations, so coming together as one collective will require preparation by the entire community. Despite the difficulties, however, Paul calls the community to remember that God will provide them with the same kind of strength and perseverance as God has provided in the past.

In this season of Lent, when we practice self-examination, let us not forget that our faith is inherently communal. We are called to live with one another in beloved community united by Christ. So let us examine ways in which we can grow as a communal body. How might God be calling us to refine our relationships and heal our divisions? As we encounter adversity, let us remember God's faithfulness and walk together in times of trial.

PRAYER

Steadfast God, we give you thanks for your faithfulness. Guide us through this season that we may not avoid the hard work of seeking peace in our communities. Teach us to serve one another with justice and mercy. In your grace, strengthen us to walk together in times of adversity and to remember Christ as the source of our unity. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 11, 2018

The Rev. Richard Wingfield '02/'13, Pastor, Unity Baptist Church, Braddock, Pa. / Theological Reflections on Ministry Course Leader

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 48:8-22

8 When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" 9 Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 Israel said to Joseph, "I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also." 12 Then Joseph removed them from his father's knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. 13 Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them near him. 14 But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 He blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16 the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth." 17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." 19 But his father refused, and said, "I

know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will invoke blessings, saying, 'God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'" So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors. 22 I now give to you one portion more than to your brothers, the portion that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."

DEVOTIONAL

Has God ever reversed your plans? You had good intentions. You did your homework. You set things in their proper order. Then when the time came to proceed, God had something different in mind and upset your proverbial apple cart. So it happens to Joseph in today's Scripture reading from Genesis. He brings his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to his father, Israel, to receive the patriarchal blessing. Joseph positions them so that Manasseh is at Israel's favored right hand and Ephraim, the younger son, is at Israel's left hand. Israel, however, crisscrosses his hands to place his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. Joseph tries to rectify the issue. But Israel knows exactly what he's doing; for though his physical sight has diminished, Israel still possesses keen spiritual insight. Though the descendants of both of Joseph's sons would be a great people, Israel sees something in Ephraim that would surpass Manasseh.

As humans, we tend to operate according to cultural norms. We are often influenced by social convention or personal bias because we're accustomed to functioning in this way. As such, we miss the big picture. The prophet reminds us that God's thoughts are distinct from ours. We must be open to and in tune with God's desires, not our own. Are you influenced by social convention or personal bias in your choices? Do you make choices based on social convention or human preferences? Or, alternatively, are you in tune with God so that you can choose based on divine directives? Jesus reminds us from Gethsemane, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."

PRAYER

God of glory, help us to be open to your will so that we may see things as you see them. Open our hearts that we may adjust to your desires. Open our spirits that we may accept your will. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 12, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Cathy Brall, PTS Director of Field Education

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. 15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 18 Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? 19 What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. 22 Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? 23 "All things are lawful," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. 24 Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, 26 for "the earth and its fullness are the Lord's." 27 If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—29 I mean the other's conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks? 31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. 11:1 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

DEVOTIONAL

For many years I subscribed to a monthly newsletter, *Nutrition Action*, because of its thorough research on the sourcing, processing, packaging, and marketing that contribute to the hidden risks or long-term benefits of the food we encounter in grocery stores and restaurants. Reading *Nutrition Action* educated me about the multiple dimensions of the food choices I faced, thus leading me to ponder the complex web of relationships belied in the simple bumper-sticker phrase, "You are what you eat."

In a similar vein through this passage from 1 Corinthians, Paul writes to encourage the Corinthian Christians to consider their own 'nutritional' actions. He exhorts them to remember the deeper significance of the bread and wine they bless and share when they gather. It is a sharing in Christ to feed them spiritually and join them together as one body such that they are becoming what they eat. If they (and we, too!) become more Christ-like through this meal, then actions and attitudes ought gradually to grow to reflect those that Jesus exhibited in his earthly life. Thus Paul asks them to take God and others into consideration when they are making their choices. They are to seek the advantage of the other, accept the hospitality that others offer to them, and, perhaps most importantly, eat, drink, and do all things to the glory of God.

What would it mean for us to seek someone else's advantage in our food choices? Do we take into account the wages and working conditions of those who gather and produce our food or those who prepare and serve us in restaurants? Is our food sustainably grown or sourced? Do we eat hastily and mindlessly to feed our urges or "partake with thankfulness" for every good gift God provides? Are we mindful about giving and working toward eradicating famine and hunger, locally and systemically? Might we take the time to invite someone to share a meal with us and graciously partake of the hospitality the other will offer us by their very presence? In this season of fasting, may we partake of those nutritional actions that would truly benefit us and the reign of God's justice and provision for all people.

PRAYER

Gracious God, giver of all good gifts, help us to eat thankfully, while recognizing that all things come from you. Help us to eat wisely and responsibly, that our food choices may satisfy our nutritional needs and not cause harm to those who procure, produce, or provide the items we consume. Finally, God, in your great mercy, keep us mindful of those who have little or nothing to eat this day. Through the Holy Spirit may we reach out and serve them as Christ came to feed and serve us. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 13, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Edwin Chr. van Driel, PTS Directors' Bicentennial Associate Professor of Theology

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

2 I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. 3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God

is the head of Christ. 4 Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, 5 but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. 6 For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. 7 For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. 8 Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. 9 Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. 10 For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. 12 For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? 14 Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 16 But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. 17 Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. 19 Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. 20 When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. 21 For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. 22 What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! 23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. 30 For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for

one another. 34 If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.

DEVOTIONAL

The Lord's Supper is not only a celebration. It is also a moment of judgment. We have largely lost that sense. A story told by the American missionary Vincent Donovan can help us rediscover it. In his *Christianity Rediscovered* Donovan writes about a eucharistic celebration among the African tribe of the Sonjo. The Sonjo were known as very experienced dancers. Vincent noticed that the members of the tribe approached the table while performing their dances, deliberately and carefully. Some of these dances were decidedly secular. Donovan was confused as to why they would perform such dances while going to celebrate communion. But the elders of the tribe told him they did so on purpose. The celebration of the Eucharist would help them to make a decision. If they could perform the dance without hesitation while going to meet the Lord at the table, they could perform the dance whenever. But if they felt shame in dancing the dance while going up, that dance should have no place in their lives at all.

The table is an anticipation of the messianic meal of God's kingdom. What cannot be brought to the table will not be brought into the Kingdom. And what cannot be brought into the Kingdom we may as well let go of now. It has no future—therefore, it warrants no place in our lives at all.

PRAYER

Lord, help me today to discern what parts of my life I cannot bring into your presence—and which I therefore should not hang on to at all. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2018

The Rev. Rebecca Hickok '93, Pastor, Waverly Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa. / Field Education Supervisor

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 50:15-26

15 Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" 16 So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 17 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place

of God? 20 Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. 21 So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. 22 So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived one hundred ten years. 23 Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were also born on Joseph's knees. 24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25 So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, "When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here." 26 And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

DEVOTIONAL

An hour before the Christmas Eve service. Choir rehearsing in the sanctuary. Greeters gathering up bulletins and candles before arriving at their stations. Communion being arranged. Sound levels being checked. All systems go until the teen in charge of putting out the luminaria runs up to me, a worried look on her face. "I've looked everywhere and I can't find them." Down the stairs to the social hall. "Why do I smell burnt coffee?" I ponder aloud. "AA is setting up," the teen tells me. "AA?!" "AA?! What are they doing he. . . . oh . . . it's Sunday night." And it hits me. Soon 27 children will arrive to get ready for the bathrobe drama and 250 people will start streaming into the sanctuary. AA? Tonight? No. Uh uh. Not possible. I walk over to the people setting up chairs and setting out pamphlets. "I'm so sorry, You can't meet here tonight. It's Christmas Eve. I mean, there will be children down here running around and lots of people upstairs and the parking lots full and" . . . and I see their faces, strained and stunned. And I stop. And I start again. "And it will all be fine. You'll be down here and we'll be upstairs and it will be fine." And it was. Angels and shepherds and donkeys and drunks. All thrown together one Christmas Eve. In a place of God.

PRAYER

In this season of Lent and throughout the whole year, thank you, Sweet Baby Jesus, for rearing up out of the cradle and gobsmacking us when we forget one of our most important jobs: showing hospitality. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2018

Corey D. Rugh, PTS Senior M.Div. Student

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; 24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

DEVOTIONAL

An incredible aspect of being a Christian is that no matter what political, economic, ethnic, racial, sex, or any other phenotypic characteristic you possess, you are a member of one body: the body of Christ. The members of the Corinthian congregation were no exception to such amalgamation. It seems, however, that they were diverse in some negative ways. Paul writes at the beginning of the letter, “Now I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters” (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). Clearly, there were some who did not have the same mind or same purpose, thus causing dissension. Anyone familiar with church life can likely conjure up a situation where such disagreement has occurred.

In an attempt to rally the Corinthians back together, Paul expounds the body-metaphor. Each member of the human body plays its specific and unique purpose. The eye cannot do what the foot can, nor can the ear perform the tasks that the hand can. Furthermore, the weaker members, such as the eyes and ears, are “indispensable.” Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to treat the seemingly weaker members of Christ’s body with greater respect and honor! Doing so is contrary to our natural instinct, by which we tend to give honor and respect only when we believe they have been rightly earned. In short, Paul is promoting equity. The result he intends is that the same care will be given to each member of Christ’s body. How blessed are we that “God has so arranged the body”!

PRAYER

Loving Father, we thank you for bringing us into the body of Christ. May we give honor and respect to those around us who are feeling weak. Teach us to deny ourselves so that we may properly care for others and encourage our fellow members in their roles as indispensable parts of the body of Christ. And when we are the ones who are weak, help us accept the care given to us by other members of the same body. So we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 2018

Kimberly Gonxhe '07, PTS Director of the Metro-Urban Institute

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

DEVOTIONAL

Faith without works is dead, and works without love are nothing. Some of us strive and toil under the banner of Christ . . . but with so many of the wrong motivations or approaches. A church planter enters a community without first consulting the faith leaders already in the neighborhood. A pastor fervently serves all the people at church while the minister's own immediate family starves for attention and affection. A layperson "does for" people in need without empowering their self-sufficiency.

Often we can become consumed by the drive, repetition, and demands of service without entertaining whether the service is relevant and/or contextually healthy for oneself and for those being served. In doing so, we can very well find ourselves relating more to a Martha preparing food than a Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. Once we untangle ourselves from the work and focus on the true need, then perspectives can change toward healthy, balanced living.

What is your motivation? Why do you do what you do? Is love at the center of it all?

PRAYER

Lord, reveal to me the things I may be blind to see that cause others harm or pain. May all my actions be of pure intent and benefit most the most vulnerable. May I be a good steward of the giftings and talents given unto me, and may they fully bring you glory. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 17, 2018

Dr. Edith Humphrey, PTS William F. Orr Professor of New Testament

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 143

- 1 Hear my prayer, O LORD;
 give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness;
 answer me in your righteousness.
- 2 Do not enter into judgment with your servant,
 for no one living is righteous before you.
- 3 For the enemy has pursued me,
 crushing my life to the ground,
 making me sit in darkness like those long dead.
- 4 Therefore my spirit faints within me;
 my heart within me is appalled.
- 5 I remember the days of old,
 I think about all your deeds,
 I meditate on the works of your hands.

- 6 I stretch out my hands to you;
 my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.
- 7 Answer me quickly, O LORD;
 my spirit fails.
 Do not hide your face from me,
 or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.
- 8 Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning,
 for in you I put my trust.
 Teach me the way I should go,
 for to you I lift up my soul.
- 9 Save me, O LORD, from my enemies;
 I have fled to you for refuge.
- 10 Teach me to do your will,
 for you are my God.
 Let your good spirit lead me
 on a level path.
- 11 For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life.
 In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.
- 12 In your steadfast love cut off my enemies,
 and destroy all my adversaries,
 for I am your servant.

DEVOTIONAL

Today we approach Holy Week; in preparation we read Psalm 143, a poignant cry of repentance and supplication. St. John Chrysostom tells us that this psalm provides the remedy for haughtiness: "if your well-doing makes you arrogant," then verse 2 ("No one living is righteous before You") "will make you immediately lowly" (Romans Homily 28). But the psalm is also for the poor, the harried and the lowly. We enter with David into the cave, crushed to the ground, harassed by enemies, parched for God, and seeking refuge with God. True refuge comes in the form of remembrance: "I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands" (verse 5). What are those divine deeds? The creation of this beautiful world, His provision for sinful Adam and Eve, His calling and guidance of Israel, His promise of the Messiah through the prophets, His coming as the God-Man, His living the perfect human life; His sacrificial and representative death; His glorious resurrection, His ascension in glory; His promised coming again; and His giving of the Holy Spirit! God has not hidden His face, but has offered us everything we need, including a thirst for Him—for we, like David, live in a "parched land." Even our longing, even our calling out, is a sign of His goodness and promise to us. How wonderful that He, anticipating our times of distress and need, has given this honest psalm!

PRAYER

Hear me, Holy Father, as you heard your Son in distress. Bring me low when I am mindless of you, and lift me up when I am close to despair. By your Holy Spirit, recall to my mind and heart all you have done, and make me thirsty for you.

SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2018

Robin Sharp, PTS Senior M.Div. Student

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 3:16-4:12

16 "Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. 17 I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.' 18 They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' 19 I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. 20 So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go. 21 I will bring this people into such favor with the Egyptians that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed; 22 each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor's house for jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians." 1 Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" 2 The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." 3 And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail"—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand—5 "so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." 6 Again, the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. 7 Then God said, "Put your hand back into your cloak"—so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body— 8 "If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. 9 If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground." 10 But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." 11 Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak."

DEVOTIONAL

Like so many of us do, Moses is trying to convince God that He has chosen the wrong person for the job. Moses sounds like someone trying to worm his way out of a responsibility so he can just continue to enjoy the calm life he knows. First, in so many words, he asks the Lord, "Why should anybody believe me?" The Lord responds with three tools to show His power in Moses. None of them are delightful: a staff that becomes a snake, a hand that turns leprous, and water that changes to blood when poured on the dry ground. Three signs showing the power of God, and still Moses argues. "I am not eloquent of speech."

How many tools has God given each one of us for responding to His call? How many times do we hesitate in answering that call? How many times do we find excuses for answering "No" just to stay in our comfort zones?

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for your persistence in pursuing us to be active parts of your ministry and for providing us with the tools we need. The places to which you call us and the instruments you provide are not always ones we would choose, so help us to recognize that you know best—and to answer "Yes." Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 19, 2018

The Rev. Erin Davenport '05, PTS Director of the Miller Summer Youth Institute

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 4:10-20, 27-31

10 But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." 11 Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." 13 But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." 14 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. 16 He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. 17 Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs." 18 Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, "Please let me go back to my kindred"

in Egypt and see whether they are still living." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." 19 The LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt; for all those who were seeking your life are dead." 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses carried the staff of God in his hand. 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. 23 I said to you, "Let my son go that he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.'" 24 On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill him. 25 But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, "Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" 26 So he let him alone. It was then she said, "A bridegroom of blood by circumcision." 27 The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went; and he met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. 28 Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him, and all the signs with which he had charged him. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. 30 Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and performed the signs in the sight of the people. 31 The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

DEVOTIONAL

Grace is a strange thing. Here in this story Moses seems to be on the way to the wrath of God. Refusing God's call on his life, he makes excuses for all the things he is unable to do. When the Lord speaks to Moses and promises to supply all that he needs, Moses still refuses. God is angry, and rightly so.

This is our daily walk with God, isn't it? God calls us; we make excuses. God tells us that all our needs will be met and that we are not alone; we still refuse. God is angry, and rightly so.

But Moses' story, like ours, does not end with God's anger. God, for some reason (which is beyond me), listens to us mere mortals. The Lord of all listens to Moses and gives him what he wants. God forgives Moses and gives him Aaron as his mouthpiece. How often is that true of us as well? How often does the Lord of all listen to us and let us off the hook? Daily.

Daily we refuse the grace and goodness and love of God in Jesus Christ. And daily God gives it to us again. Moses did nothing right to deserve God's listening ear. Yet God listened. God listens to us as well, this day, and every day, in the fullness of grace we do not deserve.

PRAYER

Thank you for grace, O God. Thank you that though I so often refuse the grace that is extended to me in Jesus, your love extends to me with each breath. Thank you that your anger is replaced by love because of the work of your Son, my Savior. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 20, 2018

Lori Arnold, PTS Continuing Education Coordinator

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 146

1 Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
2 I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
3 Do not put your trust in princes,
in mortals, in whom there is no help.
4 When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that very day their plans perish.
5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
7 who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free;
8 the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
9 The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
10 The Lord will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

It is the 35th day of the 40 days of Lent. Lent—a period of reflection and preparation for Holy Week and Easter that is to be a parallel reminder of the time that Jesus spent in the desert. I have been pondering how Jesus may have felt on his 35th day in the desert. Did he know that his time there would end in five more days? And, if he did, was there relief in his heart because the time of being in the desert was almost at an end? Or was it sadness because of what he would face upon returning to the city? Or might it have been joy because all that would come to pass during and after Holy Week would mean a new birth for all people and hope for each new morning. When we carefully consider Psalm 146 as a

prayer Jesus may have prayed on that 35th day in the desert, I think we know that praise was on his lips and joy was in his heart. May it be so for us as well.

PRAYER

Dear Creator of all that we survey, may we open our eyes and lift up our voices for the gifts bestowed upon us. And may we praise the Lord for the one true gift of Jesus. Let us move through this day with trust and happiness in the Lord. In your blessed name, we pray. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2018

Michelle Spomer, Donald G. Miller Librarian and Director of the Clifford E. Barbour Library

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence. 3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; 3 and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, 6 who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

DEVOTIONAL

While updating your CV or resumé for a job search can be a good reminder of your experience and skills, it is often the letter of recommendation from a trusted colleague that reveals what makes you an outstanding candidate for the position. The best letters will effectively communicate your most significant accomplishments and how you might even transform an organization for the better.

While the letter Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 3:3 isn't exactly a letter of recommendation as we know it, it is

a metaphorical letter of recommendation that included evidence of Paul's influence and the transformative power of the gospel of Christ in the lives of the Corinthian believers. The letters of their Christian lives were to be "read" by all those who encountered them—and were to inspire others to follow Jesus.

This passage is a beautiful and challenging one for the Lenten season. What do the letters of our lives say to others? Would they read Christ in our letters? Do they reflect the love and insight that other believers have poured into us?

PRAYER

Lord, may we "show that we are letters of Christ" to all we meet. Thank you for all those throughout our lives who have shown us how to be Christian. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2018

Dr. Helen Blier, PTS Director of Continuing Education

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 7:25-8:19

25 Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile. 8:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 2 If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. 3 The river shall swarm with frogs; they shall come up into your palace, into your bedchamber and your bed, and into the houses of your officials and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. 4 The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your officials.'" 5 And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, the canals, and the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'" 6 So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. 7 But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs up on the land of Egypt. 8 Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, "Pray to the LORD to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD." 9 Moses said to Pharaoh, "Kindly tell me when I am to pray for you and for your officials and for your people, that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile." 10 And he said, "Tomorrow." Moses said, "As you say! So that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God, 11 the frogs shall leave you and your houses and your officials and your people; they shall be left only in the Nile." 12 Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and Moses cried out to the LORD concerning the frogs that he had brought upon Pharaoh. 13 And the LORD did as Moses requested: the frogs died in the houses, the courtyards, and

the fields. 14 And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. 15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said. 16 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.'" 17 And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and gnats came on humans and animals alike; all the dust of the earth turned into gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt. 18 The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, but they could not. There were gnats on both humans and animals. 19 And the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God!" But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

DEVOTIONAL

"Won't they ever learn?" I think each year when the lectionary revisits the ten plagues. It's one of those cinematic or literary devices that just packs on the anxiety—we know the pattern, we anticipate the outcome, and despite all our frets and protests . . . it happens. Again. And again. And again. And I admit to feeling a bit smug when I see how stubborn and clueless Pharaoh and his minions are.

Today's exercise in frustration brings us strikes two and three in the "Pharaoh-just-won't-get-the-memo" storyline. And strike three is followed by seven more; I mean seriously. How many of us would like to think we'd have cried "Uncle!" at cleaning up piles of dead frogs? Enough, already! No one should need the gnats, boils, darkness, and the rest!

But it goes on. And because they just won't see, children die. And I think, "Lord, have mercy."

This year, I am struck by the ways in which we are more Pharaoh than Hebrew. I bet that, given a pen and a few minutes, anyone reading this devotional could come up with a list of plagues that bring suffering to our fellow human beings—and the creative ways we harden our hearts by resigning ourselves to the suffering because "it is what it is" or—forgive us—we blame the victims. Whether it's opiate-related deaths in Allegheny county (over 700 in 2017), children dying from gunshots in the U.S. (1300 a year), people dying from hunger worldwide (an estimated 9 million each year), or the persistence of racism, human trafficking, the elevation of profits over persons in economic systems . . . Lord, have mercy.

PRAYER

God of redemption, Lent marches inexorably to the death of another firstborn. As we turn toward Holy Week, may you finally peel away the parts of our hearts that have become like Pharaoh's and commit ourselves to seeing and responding to the suffering of our neighbors near and far. We make this

petition in the name of your own Son, whom you saw suffer and die as well.

FRIDAY, MARCH 23, 2018

The Rev. B. De Neice Welch '04, Pastor, Bidwell Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pa. / Theological Reflections on Ministry Course Leader

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 22

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
- 3 Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- 4 In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- 5 To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
- 6 But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
- 7 All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
- 8 "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver —
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"
- 9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
- 10 On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- 11 Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
- 12 Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- 13 they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
- 14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
- 15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
- 16 For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
- 17 I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
- 18 they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

19 But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
 O my help, come quickly to my aid!
 20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
 life from the power of the dog!
 21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!
 From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
 22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
 in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
 23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
 All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
 stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
 24 For he did not despise or abhor
 the affliction of the afflicted;
 he did not hide his face from me,
 but heard when I cried to him.
 25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
 my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
 26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
 those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
 May your hearts live forever!
 27 All the ends of the earth shall remember
 and turn to the LORD;
 and all the families of the nations
 shall worship before him.
 28 For dominion belongs to the LORD,
 and he rules over the nations.
 29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
 before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
 and I shall live for him.
 30 Posterity will serve him;
 future generations will be told about the Lord,
 31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
 saying that he has done it.

DEVOTIONAL

We often think of prayer as an act of faith initiated by us. We seek the Lord with all our hearts in times of great need, in times of devotional meditation, and in times of thanksgiving. We are often taught to strengthen our spiritual discipline through the practice of prayer. Since we believe that we initiate the act, we struggle with words: we struggle with eloquence, and we struggle with articulation, whether we are praying privately or publicly. But as we turn our attention to the depth of the meaning of Lent, we should remember that prayer is an act of the heart where God is the constant observer. God calls us to prayer and then “words” our mouths, because God gives speech to mortals. God will teach us as God reads our hearts and understands what mere words cannot possibly capture. It is never our initiation that meets God in “the deep,” where only deep calls. It is always God who summons us by the Spirit to answer the longing of our hearts. Our public prayers should not be a function of the mind, wit, or language without being connected to our hearts that long for the Divine. Let God guide your prayers and give you speech this Lenten season.

PRAYER

Holy One, We are ever in your mind and you are ever present in our lives. Word our mouths and give us speech so that we might thank you, praise you, adore you in our private time and in our public lives. Lead us to the place where the cross is overcome by the empty tomb so that we might know that our eloquence will never match your power. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 2018

Dr. Scott Hagley, PTS Assistant Professor of Missiology

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

13 But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—“I believed, and so I spoke”—we also believe, and so we speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. 15 Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. 16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18 because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

DEVOTIONAL

In one of his broadcasts of the radio show “A Prairie Home Companion,” Garrison Keillor tells a story about a young boy who grows up believing he has royal bloodlines. Shortly after the boy’s father left him and his mother, we are told, the boy began receiving anonymous letters claiming the family’s connection to Scandinavian royalty. The promise offered in the letters sustains the child throughout the insecurities of childhood and buffers him from fears of abandonment. His unseen identification with royalty enables him to endure all kinds of hardship with peace and equanimity.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul reflects on the different challenges faced by him and his companions for the sake of the gospel. They, too, are vulnerable and have every reason for fear. But Paul has entrusted himself to Jesus Christ and has a gospel-shaped imagination. His sufferings share in the death of Christ and place him at the mercy of the resurrection power of God: “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus, and bring us with you into his presence” (verse 14).

As with the boy in Garrison Keillor's story, identification reframes Paul's experiences so that what is hidden—his life in Christ—can re-narrate what is visible—his present circumstances . . . but with one large difference: Paul's hope stems not from anonymous letters, but from the real presence of Christ in the Spirit and through the grace poured out on the community of Christ.

PRAYER

(adapted from Psalm 43:3)

Creator God,
Send out your light and your truth;
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling.
In the name of Jesus Christ,
raised from the dead;
and by the power of your Spirit,
Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 25, 2018

George Barr, PTS Senior M.Div. Student

SCRIPTURE

1 Timothy 6:12-16

12 Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14 to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which he will bring about at the right time— he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. 16 It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

DEVOTIONAL

In this passage, Timothy is exhorted to “fight the good fight,” a biblical idiom now firmly planted in the English language. But what does it mean? The verb *agōnizō* (here rendered “fight”) is meant to evoke an athletic competition, but it might also refer more generally to a fight or struggle. Is the Christian life a race or a boxing match? Perhaps both.

Whatever is implied by the use of *agōnizō* one thing is certain: it is not easy. To remain faithful to the message of the gospel and to obey the Lord's commands is no small task, nor is

it without its perils. One thinks of English theologian John Owen's words to “be killing sin or it will be killing you.”

Yes, the Christian life is indeed a hard-run race and veritable slugging match, but its wreath is worth all our toils. Timothy is exhorted to “grasp” or “take hold of” that eternal life. At some point, we will know God more fully than ever. We will draw near to Him in his resplendent glory. And at that time, our constant longing will be satisfied. At last we will finally hear the words “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

PRAYER

Almighty and eternal God who dwells in unapproachable light, grant that we might fight our fight and run our race in faithfulness to your will as revealed in your word. Set our sights on you and on the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. May that be our reward. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 26, 2018

The Rev. Karen Rohrer, PTS Director of the Church Planting Initiative

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, 4 who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. 6 If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

DEVOTIONAL

*The leaves are falling, falling as if from far up,
as if orchards were dying high in space.
Each leaf falls as if it were motioning “no.”*

*And tonight the heavy earth is falling
away from all other stars in the loneliness.*

*We're all falling. This hand here is falling.
And look at the other one. It's in them all.*

*And yet there is Someone, whose hands
infinitely calm, holding up all this falling.*

Rainer Maria Rilke

We know the reality of suffering. We know that pain is all too real, injustice all too prevalent, cruelty all too common in a fallen and seemingly endlessly falling world. The wounds of affliction are deep and abiding. In the midst of Lent, we acknowledge the reality of death and limitation, of pain and affliction. We sit with and lament the way that our world crushes the vulnerable and exploits the weak. We admit and remember the reality of death—the ones we have lost, the ones we will lose, even the life we will one day leave behind. We take time to recognize that those losses are real.

This passage in 2 Corinthians, in its repetitive, clunky style, bears witness to the fact that suffering, pain, and affliction are no less real for those who follow Christ. We don't live on a continuum between affliction and consolation as though hoping to stay closer to the consolation side and avoid affliction by luck or divine favor. No, the world this spiraling text offers looks more like concentric circles—when affliction is closing in, the truth beyond our affliction is the God who consoles, the God who holds us up beyond all falling.

PRAYER

God of all things, uphold us as we recognize all the ways we and those we love are afflicted. Console us amid the pain we cannot move through on our own. Dwell within us and grant us strength, stand guard with your gentleness on every side of us. Make us brave and make us kind as we walk through your hurting, beloved world. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 2018

Brandon Shaw, *PTS Th.M. Student*

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 1:8-22

8 We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, 11 as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the

blessing granted us through the prayers of many. 12 Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God—and all the more toward you. 13 For we write you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand until the end—14 as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast. 15 Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favor; 16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on to Judea. 17 Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to ordinary human standards, ready to say “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time? 18 As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been “Yes and No.” 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not “Yes and No”; but in him it is always “Yes.” 20 For in him every one of God's promises is a “Yes.” For this reason it is through him that we say the “Amen,” to the glory of God. 21 But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, 22 by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.

DEVOTIONAL

“Why the tough seasons?” The answer to such a question is not always as immediately lucid as Crystal Pepsi, but my own life's winters serve as times in which God's grace shined the brightest . . . more brightly than in the “winning” (to steal the over-hashtagged term) moments. God's Isaiah 41:10 promise of presence at all times is a “yes” and gets my hearty “amen” because he has shown up at hours when I thought hope was more sunk than the S.S. Titanic was on April 16, 1912.

Sometimes God breaks the world around us to convey that he alone is enough, that his promises are true, and that we can say we concur in the midst of all earthly hellishness. As someone once told me, “You don't know God is all you need until God is all you've got.” Cliché? Maybe. True? As true as the Penguins' 2017 winning of Lord Stanley for the second time in a row.

From a humble, broken-world posture, we are often most able to see God's astounding magnificence and give God praise . . . not to mention that we have a comforting Christ, who understands us fully in affliction. And that makes all the difference.

To God, the One who rescues us from our seeming death sentences so that we see his omnipotent hand and everlasting grace and love more fully, be all glory around the globe and forevermore.

PRAYER

Father, we might not understand our afflictions fully in this life, but we know you are always with us because of the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and reigning of dear Jesus. Please shower us with your grace during troubled times that we may magnify your name. In Jesus' name. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Hunter Farrell, PTS Director of the World Mission Initiative

SCRIPTURE

Mark 12:1-11

1 Then he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 2 When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. 4 And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. 5 Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. 6 He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 7 But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 8 So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Have you not read this scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11 this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes?'"

DEVOTIONAL

The Gospel of Mark's hard-hitting parable echoes the violent story told in Isaiah 5, where "the house of Israel" is identified as a chosen, privileged vineyard. Even though Yahweh had done everything possible to prepare His vineyard to produce fruits of justice and righteousness, it yielded only "bloodshed" and injustice. So the Lord destroyed the vineyard. Today's text from Mark takes the Isaiah story a step further by introducing the vineyard-owner's son into the story: when the unruly vineyard workers refuse to listen to the pleas of the owner's messengers to produce desirable fruit, the owner sends his own son, but "they seized him, killed him and threw him out of the vineyard."

The temptation to early Christians was to misinterpret their "chosenness" as license to disobey God's call to right relationship with God and neighbor—wrongly to assume,

as Israel had done, that God's saving acts in history did not require from them the fruits of repentance and justice. American Christians have been abundantly blessed: we have enjoyed economic prosperity (relative to many parts of the world), freedom of religion and expression, and a strong democratic tradition. Yet many global Christians question whether U.S. Christians allow our faith to guide our social and political choices. Has our *privileged* position as "the redeemed" dulled our memory of the time when we were immigrants?

PRAYER

God of Life, As we consider all you have done for us in Christ, give us hearts that overflow with gratitude and guide our choices in relationship with the poor and oppressed in ways that please You. Show us clearly what the fruits of righteousness look like today around issues of racial justice, immigration, and poverty. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 2018

Dr. Shan Overton, PTS Director of the Center for Writing and Learning Support

SCRIPTURE

Mark 14:12-25

12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 13 So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, 14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." 16 So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. 17 When it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18 And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." 19 They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" 20 He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. 21 For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." 22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24 He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of

the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

DEVOTIONAL

In a prayer-poem titled “Meditation,” the Polish American poet Czeslaw Milosz writes of a God whose glory it is to wander along with us in our daily lives, to know our faults so intimately, and to approach us with great kindness. The poet prays to God-with-us, “You felt compassion for them, forgiving their mistake, / Their falsity, of which they were aware, pretending they did not know it, / And even their ugliness, as they gathered in their churches.” Echoing Mark’s Gospel on this Maundy Thursday, Milosz depicts a God who offers gracious compassion despite human duplicity and infidelity. In his institution of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus acknowledges to all his friends assembled in the Upper Room that he will be betrayed by one of them; then, he breaks bread and pours wine and shares both in a stunning act of hospitality. His lament of human unfaithfulness and ugliness is paired with his generosity and tenderness. Even as he grapples with the inevitability of his own betrayal and death, this Jesus, our Emmanuel, proffers warmth, food, and friendship in the face of human hunger and failing.

PRAYER

Holy God, you know better than we do our faults, our hunger, and our pain. Help us be ever mindful of the generosity and care shown to us by your Son, Jesus Christ, who offered kindness and hospitality when confronted with human unfaithfulness and ugliness. Walk with us as we endeavor to offer compassion to ourselves and others when we are faced with human flaws, falsity, and failings.

FRIDAY, MARCH 30, 2018

Dr. Tucker Ferda, PTS Visiting Assistant Professor of New Testament

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 1:10-20

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, 11 inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things into which angels long to look! 13 Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the

grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. 14 Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. 15 Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 17 If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. 18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. 20 He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.

DEVOTIONAL

When you consider that 1 Peter was written to Gentiles who had little to no former contact with Judaism, the claims of this text are remarkable. The passage seeks to graft these Gentiles into God’s covenant with Israel and challenges them to live within the mantra of the Holiness Code in Leviticus: “Be Holy, as I am Holy.” Moreover, it offers a new perspective of time and value for persons seemingly marginalized and persecuted by their contemporaries. They are to see that they actually live at the dawn of the end of the age and that, as Christ “ransomed” them with his very life, they have unsurpassable worth in the eyes of God.

In short, to consider what God had done in Jesus Christ meant that this community had to tell itself a new story about its past, its present, and its future. Today, Good Friday, we are called to a similar reorientation. The Christian claim is that the cross, far from being the failure of Jesus’ message, is actually the moment in which we see most clearly the heart of God. How does that change the stories we tell ourselves? Are we open to see the cross as our *axis mundi*—the center around which time, value, and purpose rotate and depend? To re-center around the cross will look different for different people, and we trust the action of the Holy Spirit among us for this good work. For those our world labels outsiders, or for those who feel uncertain of their worth, the cross may tell a story of true belonging, while for those who stand at the center of what our society adores and privileges may be invited to “lose their life” so that they may truly “find it.”

In verse 13 we find a marvelous image for this process. “Therefore”—in the light of what God has done—“gird up the loins of your understanding.” In other words, prepare for your understanding to move to a new place. Expect to travel. Our prayer today should be that, as we ponder the cross, we may find that our typical, status-quo “understanding” of priority, value, worth, and the purpose of life *may be moved* closer to the self-emptying love of God in Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Lord, our text reminds us that we have been “ransomed” from a former way of life. Our text reminds us that we live at the dawn of the new age declared by the prophets. But we too often live in the old age. Forgive our tardiness. Create in us that love you showed us on the cross. Break our hearts of stone with this love, and write it on new hearts of flesh that ache with the pains of our world. Move us to actions that mirror and embody the character of Christ. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 31, 2018

The Rev. Brenda Barnes '07, Pastor, NuValley Presbyterian Church, Rural Valley, Pa. / Doctor of Ministry Reformed Focus Student / PTS Alumnae/i Council Member

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 4:1-11

1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “As in my anger I swore, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” though his works were finished at the foundation of the world. 4 For in one place it speaks about the seventh day as follows, “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” 5 And again in this place it says, “They shall not enter my rest.” 6 Since therefore it remains open for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he sets a certain day—“today”—saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. 9 So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; 10 for those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs. 12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. 14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

DEVOTIONAL

Anyone who has ever skinned a knee or elbow from a fall oJesus was dead. There is no denying it. In words from the movie “The Wizard of Oz,” he was “spiritually, physically, positively, absolutely, undeniably and reliably dead.” His body lay in the tomb while his disciples mourned his death and, since it was the Sabbath, they rested. The women returned home to prepare the burial spices to honor him, and then they rested. At the tomb, the guards did their job of watching the tomb to make sure that none of Jesus’ followers came to steal his body. They rested in the grass at the rock, because the disciples were celebrating their Sabbath—they wouldn’t come.

But those pictures are earthly pictures—human pictures. While humans were resting on the Sabbath, Jesus was working. According to Paul’s letter to Ephesus, Jesus descended to the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9). Peter tells his readers that Jesus preached to the imprisoned spirits (1 Peter 3:19-20).

In chapter 4 of Hebrews, the writer reminds us that the promise of entrance into Christ’s rest “still stands,” and the promise is only realized when we remember the work of Christ on earth, below the earth, and in heaven. The whole Easter mystery of resurrection becomes much clearer in the context of Holy Saturday, namely, that Christ’s work continued even in his death and continues even in his resurrection and reign. Salvation has been finished since the creation of the world (v. 3). That reality should give us rest and confidence, not in our works, but in the work of him who created all. Holy Saturday—Holy Sabbath.

PRAYER

Holy, mysterious God: In your mercy, help us to find true Sabbath rest in you. Help us to rest in the promise of your glory here and forever. May our Holy Saturday truly be a day of remembrance in the promise of that glorious rest. For the sake of the One who died and rose again, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Christine Chakoian, PTS Vice President for Seminary Advancement

SCRIPTURE

John 1:1-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come

The Scripture quotations contained in the lectionary readings are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."') 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

DEVOTIONAL

The light shining in the darkness. Usually we link this image from John with Christmas, when the winter solstice brings the longest night, and we light our candles to testify to the inextinguishable light that is born in Jesus Christ.

Yet Holy Week reminds us that there is still more terrifying darkness on earth than the yearly limitation of the sun—the darkness produced by the sin of humanity. Christ's death on the cross exposes that darkness, manifested by cynical political powers, well-intended religious leaders, passive crowds, and frightened followers.

Christ's crucifixion did not eradicate the darkness born of sin. We know it still. Yet this we also know: Christ's resurrection reveals that all the darkness in the world can never overcome the light. God's will is stronger than the will of our flesh; God's grace is more enduring than our sin; and God's true light will someday enlighten everyone. This is the promise of Easter.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we praise you that your light prevails; for no darkness can ever overcome it. Open our eyes today, and in this season to come, that we might see signs of your light everywhere: in places of grace, in testimonies of truth, in acts of Godly power, and in the glory of your risen Son. In his enduring name we pray. Amen.

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