



Welcome!

Dear friend in Christ:

We commend this book of Lenten Meditations as one spiritual tool for your journey with Jesus Christ. We know that many of you already follow a daily devotional practice, and we encourage you to continue with that practice. What makes this booklet unique is that these daily devotions are created by folks within our six churches, people we know, those with whom we work, worship, and serve. As you read the scripture passage for this devotion, 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, and the meditations drawn from it, also reflect on the person who wrote it. Lift that person in prayer—prayer of thanksgiving for sharing his/her/their faith with us, and prayer for God's continued presence and blessing in their lives. Our theme for this year's Lenten Meditations is "Strengthening reconciliation for a life-giving shared future". We are grateful that these verses from 2 Corinthians 5 have inspired meditations that promote reconciliation between people and with God. Thank you to our writers for sharing their experiences that help us embrace our connection to each other and Christ.

We invite you to read the passage each day before reading the devotions slowly and thoughtfully. In whatever way you open God's word, let God's Spirit guide your thoughts in this time of reflection, that you would be open to Paul's teaching and Christ's leading during these days of Lent and Holy Week.

In Christ's Love,

The Rev. David Elton

The United Church of Los Alamos

The Rev. Keith Lewis

The United Church of Los Alamos

The Rev. Nicolé Raddu Ferry

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2 Corinthians 5:17-20

NIV

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

NRSV

⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

The Message

16-20 Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life emerges! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

Ash Wednesday, February 14

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation..." (2 Corinthians 5:18)

Already

I remember participating in an Ash Wednesday service my first year as an ordained minister with other churches from the Venice, Florida, community. There were Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Baptists at that service. With my fresh-out-of-seminary theological radar, I remember the preacher's message being a little too upbeat for Ash Wednesday. Standing next to him during the imposition of ashes, I also remember him replacing the word "dust" with words like "bless" and "grace". That was no way for people to begin Lent, especially after a rockin' Fat/Shrove Tuesday! There was less acknowledgement of our human condition and need for repentance, and more blessing and grace. That's like Ash Wednesday falling on Valentine's Day. Bah humbug!

Likewise, Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5 don't seem to fit Ash Wednesday very well. They seem to be all about our new creation and condition in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they more than suggest that we already have at least one foot at the empty tomb and one at the Great Commission mountain, as those already made new in Christ and already reconciled to God! If that's too upbeat for us, maybe this year on this first day of Lent we can embrace the invitation to be joyful ambassadors of God's reconciliation. For that has everything to do with words and deeds of blessing, and grace to this divided and lonely world.

Prayer: Thank you, God of grace, for the joyful reminder of the good news that our lives are already new and closer to You. Inspire us to share Christ's reconciling love and peace each day, even this day. Amen.

The Rev. David Elton
The United Church of Los Alamos

Thursday, February 15

New Life in Christ

As I read this passage, God is calling me to be a new person in Christ before I can be reconciled to God, before I can do the work of calling other people to reconciliation. The old life I am to give up is the life in which I must be right all the time. It's the life in which I don't forgive someone if they don't apologize. It's the life in which I don't love people who don't agree with me. It's the life in which I put my needs, desires, and ambitions ahead of everyone else's. It is, frankly, a comfortable life... for me.

But Paul encourages us to be reconciled to God, to be part of God's life.

"Don't think you are better than you really are...Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.... Love one another with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other...Bless those that persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them...Live in harmony with each other... don't think you know it all: Never pay back evil with more evil...Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone." Romans 12:3-17

Living this new life is a tall order. It is not a life where I can live in my own power. Neither could Paul. That's why he says, "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So, I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

This Lenten season, I aspire to live the new life that Christ offers.

Prayer: God, I pray that You, who began the good work in me, will keep on working in me until Jesus comes again.

Julie Shimer
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Friday, February 16

⁹Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. ¹²For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (1 Peter 3:9-12, NIV)

Respect and Reconciliation

My first summer working at the Ark, I was a floater, helping anyone who needed assistance. I still remember that day I was the substitute in a toddler class. A child, we'll call Debbie, just went up and bit another child, not for the first time, I found out later. At the end of the day, I reported to her mother what Debbie had done. Mom went right away to complain to the director that I was picking on their family because I didn't approve of their marital relationship. I was shocked. That was the furthest thing from my mind.

That Fall, I became a teacher and Debbie was one of my students. Remembering what happened earlier, I was nervous. No matter how hard we tried, Debbie continued to bite. I treated the family with the same respect that I treated all my families. We had a great year doing many fun learning activities and the children grew. By the end of the year, Debbie's mom was one of my biggest supporters. The original matter was never discussed. We didn't need to. Sometimes reconciliation is as 1 Peter says, "Repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." We were reconciled because I didn't seek retaliation and always treated them with respect. They learned that what they thought was a problem wasn't one at all.

Prayer: Dear Lord, when I find myself in a difficult situation, help me to always treat the other person with respect. Amen.

Carol Mead First United Methodist Church

Saturday, February 17

He Makes All Things New... and You Too!

As I glanced over the text on which we are focusing for this Lent's devotional, several words came to my mind: restore, renew, transform, and redeem (to name a few). I am a person who most easily experiences God in nature, and I find that these beautiful concepts are so stamped and intertwined into His Creation all around us. How can one not see it? Especially in this amazing corner of the world that we call home! The Pajarito Plateau is bursting with God's fingerprints! And they become even more incredible the longer I watch them because I get to see how they change. And if our Creator can take so much care in these little, seemingly-insignificant renewals, imagine how He cares for our own restoration? The God who turns winter into spring, and the long night into the gorgeous sunrise, is the same God who plans even more glorious transformations for us, His beloved children. And boy, do we need it!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am humbled by Your desire to make a new creation in me, a sinner. Thank you for never giving up on any of your precious children, and always desiring to draw us closer to You. Amen.

Maggie Moore
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

The First Sunday in Lent, February 18

Ambassadors of Hope

Pain induces self-centered responses to stimuli. Reactions to pain are immediate and can span a spectrum of intensity. Reactions to pain are long term and can span a spectrum of intensity. Reactions to pain can be conscious and deliberate. Reactions to pain can be unconscious and automatic.

Any conversation about reconciliation begins with awareness of an injury. For small injuries, reconciliation is simple and by far easier than holding a grudge. For large injuries, the challenges facing reconciliation grow considerably. Our culture surrounds us with images of retribution and revenge enacted pettily or violently. We are inundated with perpetuations of aggression in all the grandeur we can muster through self-righteousness.

Yet, those that take on the name Christian have a choice before them. Despite the assurances of some groups claiming Christ, the choice isn't between pain and suffering and their utter absence. The choice is in how we react to the pain we encounter in this world. Will we heal and seek to impede the progress of hurt, or will we perpetuate the pain happening around us?

An ambassador is a political term of relations between nations, and the Greek word is the origin of the word Presbyter or Elder. If we chose the path of hope in Christ and strive to impede the progress of the hurt of this world, we are ambassadors of that hope. We bear that message to ourselves and anchor our own inner relationship to hope. We bear that message to those we know well and our relationships with them witness to the message.

Lastly, we ambassadors bear that message to the world around us. With the help and power of God, injury and self-righteous vengeance can be overcome by pardon and reconciliation.

Prayer: Lord, guide us in the work of reconciliation, to turn injury to pardon, self-righteousness to humility, and retribution to healing. Amen.

The Rev. Sean Smith
White Rock United Methodist Church

Monday, February 19

"For in him God in all his fullness chose to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross—all things, whether on earth or in heaven. (Colossians 1:19-20 ESB)

You Cannot Earn What You Already Have

College challenged my childhood faith a lot. I met people who wore their faith like a battering ram, judging others "salvation" while convinced an exclusive, narrow path of believing, saying, and doing the right things lead to heaven, the prime goal. A Rotary fellowship in Australia added to my confusion as I lived with wonderfully differing nationalities, many who knew little of Christianity. How could a God of Love not love these special people when I did? My life-long faith pilgrimage found its anchor when I came close to bleeding to death. I knew I could die and gave myself to God. Despite the pain, instant peace and only what I can describe as love enfolded me. I knew I would be fine whether I died or recovered, which made the medical staff nervous. This reconciliation was a gift that has never left me. A key component to this love was that it was freely given. I had not earned it, and I felt strongly it was for all people and this beautiful earth. My role in life is to love God, and to mirror God's free gifts of mercy and reconciliation to humanity, including myself.

"God does not love you because you are good. God loves you because God is good." RICHARD ROHR

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for reconciling us to You through perfect LOVE. Please help us to be Christ's ambassadors and to love one another as You have loved us. Amen.

Betty Smith
The United Church of Los Alamos

Tuesday, February 20

Daily Reconciliation

Reconciliation is defined in many different ways. I like this definition from SACAP (South African Council of Applied Psychology): "Reconciliation is a process that's focused on healing relationships. On a personal level, it means acknowledging hurtful actions and their resulting emotions. Then apologizing for one's part in an issue, forgiving and letting go of the associated grudges."

For the last ten years or so, I have had a workout partner that I meet for a workout almost daily. During our workouts, we talk... a lot. Our lives have significantly changed over the course of these ten years. When we first started, our respective children were in elementary school. Now, they are all in some phase of college, planning for college, gainfully employed, or planning weddings. Our jobs haven't changed in this time, but, since we're both teachers, we have many discussions about our daily lives as educators.

As we talk, we share our opinions and offer advice about issues with our kids or problems of the day at school. We don't always agree with each other or appreciate the advice given. Sometimes our discussions are somewhat heated. But, every day, we appreciate each other. We value our friendship enough that, through daily reconciliation, our relationship stays healthy and continues to grow. We apologize when necessary, forgive one another, and let go of grudges, so that the next day when we get to the gym, we are happy to see each other and do it all over again.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, Thank you for the gifts of love and friendship and for teaching us how to forgive, so that our relationships may continue to grow and thrive. I pray that, as we journey through this season of Lent, we may be reconciled to You and each other. Amen.

Kandice Favorite
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Wednesday, February 21

Ambassadors for Christ

As I meditated on this year's focal passage from 2 Corinthians 5, I was taken back some 40+ years to a time when I memorized this passage as a reflection of my personal faith journey. Like many, I was raised in the faith from an early age. I fell away during my college years and young adulthood, and then found my way back to faith when the promises of worldly living proved to be empty and destructive.

I truly saw myself as a new creation. My old ways had been replaced with a new, more-peaceful life. And it was entirely God's doing. It was by the grace of God I was renewed and reclaimed. God reconciled me to Himself and to life. One of the positive outcomes from that time is that God has given me a heart for those who are now experiencing similar circumstances in life. There are a lot of hurting, lost people in our world today, but when viewed through the lens of my experience, I know that God loves each one of them with the same intensity with which He loves me, and all who are created in His image.

We are truly called to be Christ's ambassadors! A simple greeting or smile can be enough to brighten another's day and show them someone cares. It costs us nothing to be kind, but it can be a huge investment in the lives of others and may be the very thing needed for them to experience the reconciling love of God. How can I, or any of us, do any less?

Prayer: Holy God, give us the strength to truly be ambassadors for Christ and to freely show Your reconciling love and grace to a hurting world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Gary Read
White Rock United Methodist Church

Thursday, February 22

³²Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. ³³As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame." (Romans 9:32-33, NIV)

Stumbling into Reconciliation

Lent is a season associated with spiritual discipline, and sometimes that spiritual training coincides with physical preparation or restoration. A couple years ago, I was training for the Jemez Trail Race. That section of trail's surface was covered with loose rock, but when I stubbed my foot on a firmly embedded stone, I pitched forward and crashed to the ground. "A rock that will make people fall."

Even while disparaged myself for being too clumsy and old, I rolled over and looked up the steadily climbing trail, determined to keep going.

Suddenly, from there, on my knees, something caught my eye. About eight feet in front of where I fell, I saw a black glove in a bush, and recognized it as mine. The glove had fallen from my backpack more than two weeks earlier while running the same trail. I still had its mate at home. However, that stone planted in the ground made me stumble, and the fall changed my perspective. From my knees, I was able to see the glove I couldn't see just days before.

Most of the Bible's references to stumbling point out the consequences of wrongdoing, but stumbling isn't always negative. Paul writes that trusting in our own works will lead to stumbling. But if that stumble leads us to trust in Christ for reconciliation with God, then good has come from our fall.

My hand was bruised, but I was reconciled with my glove, and I pondered how God can work in our lives. Everyone stumbles now and then as they walk with the Lord, but sometimes it is more than a metaphor. And when we stumble, we look up from our knees with a new perspective on the world around us.

Prayer: Lord, let us see Your world from new perspectives. Amen.

Brent Collom
First United Methodist Church

Friday, February 23

In Pursuit of Joy

We believe God teaches us, through both Holy Scripture and (perhaps even more strongly) the Holy Spirit, that God seeks deep, meaningful, and committed relationship between ourselves and God (consider Mark 12:29-30), and also between ourselves and our neighbor (Mark 12:31). We must also understand and accept (dare we say, "be reconciled to"?) that our "neighbor" includes each and every child of God, as taught in the parable of the Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37).

Our own life experience has taught us that the greatest joys we experience are derived from our relationships. When relationships are torn asunder by arguments, disagreements (dare we raise the "P" word ... politics?), or some other cause, we pay a heavy toll in lost joy. Why then, is it so difficult to reconcile a relationship after an argument or disagreement? Could it be as simple as one's ego?

God's mind-boggling desire for relationship with us is demonstrated by God's "reconciling us to Himself through Christ." Though we were (and continue to be) at fault, it is God who took the first huge leap in reconciling our relationship. God's leap did not come cheaply, and we bare a tremendous responsibility to actively respond, each and every day, to God's invitation for reconciliation and relationship. Imagine the joys that await!

Furthermore, Paul tells us that "God gave us the ministry of reconciliation" which we take to be an admonition to follow God's example and take the first step to reconcile with our neighbor. Imagine the joys that await!

Prayer: Let us pray: Lord God, grant us strength and humility to reconcile our relationships, with You and with our neighbors. Help us set aside our egos, beg forgiveness for any wrongs we may have done or hurts we may have caused and begin the journey on the path of reconciliation.

Bob Kraus and Louise Hanna
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Saturday, February 24

I Must Forgive Myself in Order to Forgive Others

The years in my twenties were an endless struggle to come to accept my own frail humanity. How could God accept and forgive my constant failures to be a "good Christian" when I was not worthy? Back then, I expected I should somehow rise above my weak nature in order to reach perfection, whatever that meant.

I remember a small boy at his birthday party, opening presents and suddenly pushing one aside, declaring, "This isn't good enough! I don't want it!" Was that how I was?

Some years ago, a wise old soul finally enlightened me, asking, "Who made you?" Before I could reply, he said, "Guess He had a reason for making you the way you are. Why in the world would He ever throw away His own child after promising you forgiveness?"

God gave me the gift of my existence, my personal being, and my soul. Why was it easier to accept another's mistakes while holding myself to different standards? He promises us forgiveness and mercy, even as weak, unworthy humans. All I have to do is accept His forgiveness and fully own it. As a young adult, I did not truly understand this great generosity, the gift of my life He so lovingly fashioned. Everything I am comes from Him. He created me and holds me in the palm of His hand.

In time, I found the more I trusted Him, the easier it became. In reconciling with God, I was finally able to fully accept His forgiveness and to ultimately forgive my own human weakness. Only then could I learn to authentically forgive others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father who lovingly created me, please help me to live with a humble mind in Your perfect peace and healing, trusting You love me just as I am.

Jeanne Gibson
First United Methodist Church

The 2nd Sunday in Lent, February 25

Listening Hearts

I love reading scripture because it cannot be read quickly. It is not meant to instantly inspire us. We may find ourselves foraging through the books of the Bible, looking for snappy wisdom or fast-food truth which does not readily satiate our hunger. Thus, we are rendered disappointed, filled with anxiety and even confusion. The scriptures are filled human pathos. God uses hyperbole, metaphor, paradox, irony, poetry, and world mythology as Living Word to transform us.

During her 84 years of life, my spiritual ambassador, my grandma Lois, encountered a few disappointments. But haven't we all? The last summer of her life, we were together in Salt Lake City working to fulfill my Clinical Pastoral Education requirements for seminary at an Episcopal hospital in the shadow of the headquarters for the Church of Latter-Day Saints, I would return home each night to share my day with Grandma Lois. My stories embodied sadness, disease, the harsh realities of a broken medical system, and faithful hope. My self-focused life expectations did not always reconcile with the reality of how it was. Where was Jesus in it all? Grandma's listening ear accompanied me as I processed out loud how my Christian faith was a pilgrimage of reconciliation between my head and my heart. Spiritual ambassadors encircle us. Who is accompanying you on your pilgrimage of reconciliation this Lent? Who might you listen to anew?

Prayer: Gracious and merciful Christ, give us the eyes to see, the ears to hear, and the hearts to receive the ambassadors of faith who journey with us as we move deeper into you. Amen.

Pastor Kate Schlechter, Associate Bridge Pastor Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Monday, February 26

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Colossians 3:12)

Clothed in Compassion

In the early 2000s, I taught English at Bell Junior High in Paradise Hills, Southeast San Diego. But it was no paradise. Most of the students had never been to the sunny beaches only 10 miles away. Every time there was a fire drill, a big fight would break out between the Crips, the Bloods, and other gangs. Chaos.

I wasn't very successful at teaching literacy. Most of my time was spent breaking up fights, calling out foul language, and trying to meet with immigrant families who were sometimes working three jobs, maybe in prison, or just not around.

One time, a gentleman came to our school to speak to our students. He was Muslim (as were many of the students), and his son was a pizza delivery boy who had been shot dead by a 14-year-old as a gang initiation. The grandpa of the shooter (now in a youth lock-up facility) was a Christian man, and he also was there to talk to the kids. They told their student audience, who were surprisingly quiet, that they had forgiven each other and each other's kin. They were working for reconciliation among the folks in Paradise Hills.

They just told their stories "clothed in compassion", and asked the kids to feel empathy and consider forgiving others for the unfair things in their lives. I have no idea how this impacted the students over time—it did spark some conversation. But the gang fights and unruly behavior pretty much continued as I remember. I left that school in 2007 after I was attacked by a student while on lunch duty.

How to forgive? How to reconcile? I'm still working on it. But those gentlemen's stories stuck with me as the true work of reconciliation.

Prayer: Dear God, help us forgive as the Lord forgave us.

Jennifer Holmes
White Rock Presbyterian Church

Tuesday, February 27

Changed from Enemy to Friend

This is the Apostle Paul's way of describing God's reconciling of all of humanity to God's Self, and, our task of taking that very good news to all of humanity, called to the freedom of reconciliation.

Oh God, help me! I haven't a good track record of exhibiting reconciliation.

Truth be told, early in my spiritual formation, I had bought into some manmade doctrines about people who did not fit the prevailing cultural norms.

After much closer study and quality time spent with the Jesus revealed in the Gospels, along with the help of the Holy Spirit, I could honestly admit that in the time of Jesus, I would have aligned with the legalistic Scribes and Pharisees. Then I came to realize that if God the Creator made all of humanity in God's image, called us "good", and loves us all, who am I to not do the same? Everyone I see, then, is an expression of God.

Not to mention, the social fringe folks in church, and outside of church, who have totally disarmed me of prejudice by their Christ-like love. They don't "fit the norm" of man-made ideals and doctrines, but they are my siblings-in-Christ, and I do love them now, without reservations. By Christ's reconciling love, I can honestly say, every ping of my prejudice has disappeared.

Prayer: Praise God for turning me from being an enemy into a friend through these unaligned friends and for the sake of Christ Jesus! Amen.

Georgia Strickfaden
The United Church of Los Alamos

Wednesday, February 28

"Love your enemies." (Luke 6:27-36, NIV)

Love Your Enemies

I have often had a hard time figuring out what the Apostle Paul is saying and being inspired by him. The chosen scripture from 2 Corinthians is one of those examples. Therefore, I have chosen an alternate which did bring to mind an occasion when I felt God calling me to pray for my "enemy."

Years ago, our parish held an ecumenical monthly healing service where we were invited to the altar rail to lift up a personal prayer request, or to intercede for another person in need. One of those services was attended by a friend whose house was destroyed by the Cerro Grande fire in 2000. As hands were laid on her, she offered up prayer for Roy Weaver, the Bandelier superintendent who "lit the match" for the intended controlled burn. Many of us were in awe that she was so forgiving.

A few months later, after the attacks on 9/11, God called me to offer up prayers for Osama bin Laden. What - my enemy? The enemy to all of us in America? Nevertheless, I obeyed. I fully realized that as God forgives even the most heinous sins, we are also called to forgive. Look what Jesus endured for us!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, just as Your son asked forgiveness for those torturing him on the cross, help me to follow his example. Give me a pure heart in which I can love my enemies, my family, and my neighbor with Your love. Amen.

Cathy Walters
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Thursday, February 29

²⁶It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. (Lamentations 3:26, ESV)

Enjoy the Ride

We're in a BEAUTIFUL resort! There is a blue sky, sunshine, a few clouds, and beautiful tropical trees and flowers!

What could be more beautiful? More relaxing? Never mind that there is no glass on the windows—only screens. And I saw at least four huge spiders—at least 4 inches across!

We were walking to our room when BAM! A huge grasshopper landed on the ground—almost on my head!

Then I noticed how beautiful it was...one of God's magnificent creatures in all its glory. It was about 4 inches long, and mostly black but with some brown stripes/spots. Why do I have to hurry to the pool? Enjoy the walk. "Enjoy the ride." It's all in God's time, not mine.

God, why is it so hard for me to just "let go, let God"? Why can't I just enjoy my time with You and Your beautiful creatures? Why can't I just let You fill my spirit with Your word, Your hope, and Your peace? To listen to the quiet, still voice and know that You are God?

It came to me like a whisper. "Because you don't let me."

I had let my own timetable interfere. Let the grasshopper jump. Let the spiders crawl. Enjoy God's beautiful handiwork and just KNOW that HE is God.

Prayer: Dear God, fill me with trust to let go and let You be God. Allow my timeline to be Yours, for that which is most life-giving. Amen.

Cathy Hinojosa
First United Methodist Church

Friday, March 1

Whoever has ears, let them hear. (Matthew 11:5)

Politics as Usual

The legislative session ended, and we lost our fight. School funding in Texas would be drastically reduced, and every school would experience the impact. I had been involved for months with a small group of advocates. We engaged with our congressmen, hosted letter-writing campaigns, sent out email blasts, and rallied in Austin.

While this advocacy group wasn't faith-based, I felt Jesus was calling me to justice by caring for children who didn't have a voice. Ultimately, I felt angry and betrayed. In frustration, I wrote an email to our group of advocates denouncing our local senator and declaring that anyone who votes for his party is misguided.

Shortly, I received a carefully worded email from woman—a Christian—explaining her position and why she and her husband would likely continue to support this party. I was embarrassed about shooting off the email and also felt confused. I began thinking about how much she and I *did* have in common. I prayed that we could continue our friendship knowing we had a gaping political difference. "Listen with ears to hear" came to my mind.

What I learned from my friend was the need to speak first in areas of agreement. Our group's work continued, and our communications were carefully worded to exclude political jargon. This ultimately resulted in connecting with even more people. Perhaps this was Christ who "gave us the ministry of reconciliation" 2 Corinthians 5:18.

Prayer: Lord, forgive us when we speak in anger and frustration. Prod us with passion for Your children. Give us ears to listen and the words that You would have us speak. Amen.

Marie Michnovicz
The United Church of Los Alamos

Saturday, March 2

³⁷"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:37, NIV)

Self-Loathing

I've heard the phrase, and found myself saying, "Why is this happening to me?" after I had gone through one of the hardest, most-horrific moments in my life. It was the lowest I had ever felt. I was convinced I had done something terribly wrong to cause this misfortune. I became so filled with grief and self-loathing that I felt myself pulling inward. My movements were on autopilot while I existed in the world. I prayed for strength to overcome my inner turmoil.

It wasn't a specific moment where I felt strengthened, but it was through a series of small moments that slowly brought my reconciliation with my private chaos. Moments such as feeling the warmth of the sun on a beautiful day, enjoying the laughter and love of my friends and family, seeing compassion from a random stranger, knowing that love, joy, and hope still existed through the pain and sorrow. Slowly, I realized the weight of that tragic moment was easier to carry.

Prayer: Lord, please help us find inner strength during the vulnerable moments in our lives to see the limitless light and hope You bring us so that we may shine it within ourselves and on our fellow people. Amen.

Jennifer Robinson
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

The 3rd Sunday in Lent, March 3

A Peaceful Revolution

Many centuries ago, a teenage boy was kidnapped by pirates, taken far from home, and sold into slavery. During his captivity, he endured nearly six years in the wilderness, with only the cattle he was guarding for company. Before this misfortune befell him, he had very little regard for the faith of his family. But alone in the wilderness, he began to "pray without ceasing." Eventually, an angel came to him in a dream and told him how he could escape. He walked hundreds of miles and found a ship that would take him away from the land of his captivity.

The teenage boy who was dragged from his home, with no discernible faith, returned as a young man with a deep prayer life and a calling to apostolic ministry. It wasn't long before he had another dream. This time a messenger came bearing a letter. It pleaded "Holy servant boy, come and walk among us again." Finally free and safe with his family, he was called to return to those who had enslaved him. Encouraged by his faith in Christ, Patrick returned to Ireland.

The conversion of the Irish is remarkable among the history of Christian missions. The High King and the Irish people were won over through friendship and reconciliation, rather than compulsion and bloodshed. Patrick returned to walk among the Irish again as a servant of Christ and a friend of all.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood cross so that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.

— Charles Henry Brent

The Rev. Mary Ann Hill
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Monday, March 4

Radical Love

I find myself apologizing for Christians a lot. More frequently than I should. I have recently tried to do so in my actions. We recently moved and used The Delancy Street Moving Company. Before they came, I prayed for an opportunity to show them "Radical Love." The kind of love Jesus showed his friends and enemies. The kind of love that people remember. The kind of love that makes people think, why would he do that?

I am sure these hard-working people run into many individuals who yell at them or talk down to them because of societal views on manual labor or more horrific reasons like skin color or background. Yes, even Christians. I tried my best to treat them with respect and show my appreciation in words. As they were finishing, an accident happened, and an antique desk given to me by my grandfather-in-law broke. I conversed silently with my wife, and we decided to give them the desk. They would fix it and use it in their offices. Rather than seeking a punitive resolution, I gave grace and radical love.

Did I change their minds about how some Christians treat people? I let my profession be known, after all. Maybe. Did I change their mind about God and/or the church? I don't know. But I am not in the business of counting. I am in the business of kindness, service, and radical love. I leave the reconciling of the soul and heart to God. I just pray I can be used to jump-start that conversation for people.

Prayer: God of radical love, help us treat everyone with grace so that when they ask why, You can make Your presence in our lives known.

Philip Ortega First United Methodist Church

Tuesday, March 5

Wearing the Belt of Faith

Most of us have seen electricians and carpenters wearing their leather tool belts with their uniquely designed tools clinking as they walked. They depend on what they have to get their job done.

This Lenten scripture reminds us to also wear such a belt of faith. God gave us the ministry of reconciliation. In order to fulfill this ministry, He gave us the tools, or attributes, that we need.

Do we have compassion and sympathy for them... do we live in humbleness... to be merciful... are we aware of the Golden Rule... do we show kindness and patience... does the peace of Christ rule in our hearts... is the Word of God dwelling in us... do we hold and show thankfulness to God... are we known as a gentle soul... do we demonstrate self-control when we seek to reconcile... can we feel empathy and see their view of conflict...

The word, and action of, "reconciliation" entails many situations and various characteristics of brethren. In order to keep our faith belt useful and enabled, keep in your mind and heart it pleases God to dwell in unity. He expects our tongue and lips to speak goodness, not evil. We have God-given love to our brethren. If God so loved us, we ought to love one another. May we use the attributes you give us.

Prayer: Merciful God who loves and forgives us all, hear our prayers for discernment when we try to reconcile with our siblings in Christ. May we say AMFN.

Thelma Hahn
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Wednesday, March 6

Reconciliation is Our Hope

It's been so difficult to watch the news these last few years, starting with Covid that separated us physically and politically, divisions that worsened due to political views, racial prejudices, and foreign wars. The world is certainly in need of peace and harmony, and reconciliation! One thing that all this certainly demonstrates is that we are social beings, and we need to interact. We need each other, and we depend on each other. Each of us is truly an important part of the body of Christ. How different and better the world would be if we acted like God intended us to, and treated each other with His love, patience, respect, and kindness. Wars might be resolved without a shot fired or a bomb dropped if leaders talked to each other with dignity. If enemies reconciled, could there actually be peace on earth?

If we are blessed with God's amazing reconciliation through His son Jesus Christ, who redeemed our sinful lives and made us a new creation, then we should be proclaiming God's message of reconciliation to all people.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your amazing grace that gives us hope for reconciliation in this troubled world. May we recognize this gift you have provided for us, and accept it, rejoice over it, and share it. In your name we pray, AMEN.

Irene Powell
The United Church of Los Alamos

Thursday, March 7

The Outside and the Inside

When I woke up on my 16th birthday, I expected to look older. I expected maturity and wisdom to appear on my face declaring to everyone I met, "Oh now, she is an adult." That didn't happen. The reflection of who I was on the inside did not align with who I appeared to be on the outside. The person I was growing into was fully wrapped up in a skin I had not yet shed. I was received by others based on what they saw, not who I knew myself to be. When we declare the love of Christ and become new, who we have become does not often align with our environment. The direction of our focus, of our dedication, has shifted, but the journey is what changes us. The further we walk alongside Christ—fueled by the Holy Spirit and walking in the presence of God—the further we open ourselves up to the reconciliation of the love of God. God reconciles with us so we can reconcile with others, so they can then reconcile with God. We are determined to become greater in the love of God, because that is who we are called to be in Christ.

Prayer: God of all love, share with us Your Spirit, that we may continue to grow in this life and the life beyond. Bless us and keep us, in Your Holy name. Amen.

Sam McRae Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Friday, March 8

Response to Grace

When someone follows the LORD, something new emerges. Nothing becomes more important than following God. Missed your favorite show last night? It suddenly doesn't matter. You are following God, and He will lead you down the right path. Your whole life has changed; everything is new.

Long ago, the LORD told us that He reconciled us with Him through His son, Jesus Christ. He has given us the ability to reconcile with neighbors, friends, and strangers too. He has brought us into His grasp of hope, love, and faith! But not all of us. God doesn't judge people based on their skin color, race, gender, religion, or anything. He just spreads His arms wide for the people who don't follow. Some people choose not to follow the LORD.

God commissions us to be His ambassadors. He tells us to ask those who aren't followers to follow Him. He commands us to nudge those people towards Him. And since He is our God, we follow Him. We help those in need, and nudge those who need nudging toward the LORD. We worship - and help others worship - the LORD our God.

Prayer: Lord, help us to trust You and have courage to live as witnesses of the new creation You have begun in us. Amen.

Jane Smith (11 yrs old)
White Rock United Methodist Church

Saturday, March 9

A Theology of Hope and Reconciliation

The time is 1956. A time of social turmoil surrounding issues of race; nationalism; and personal, family, economic, and class tension (sound familiar?). The turbulent 1960s still lies ahead. It is a time of challenge. A time of anxiety, conflict, fear, and anger. It is a time when traditional values, traditional institutions, and traditional ways of living are all called into question. The United States is in the early years of a movement that will later be known as the Civil Rights movement. Mistrust and conflict are everywhere, and there seems little opportunity for resolution, or even dialogue. "Man - Do We Need Some Basis for Hope!"

Churches are called to find new focus and relevance for their ministry in this uncharted territory. The Second Vatican Council is still in the future with its restructuring Roman Catholic thought and practice, but the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA (GA) receives a proposal to revise the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The GA, instead, commissions a new Confession for this place and time. It takes 7 years to create the first draft, and another four to adopt the "Confession of 1967", before it takes its place beside Confessions of the Church, some earlier confessions dating from the first century. This Confession is based on just one passage of scripture, 2 Corinthians 5:19, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself". It is a confessional document—virtually a whole theology—based on the need for and hope of reconciliation. In three sections: God's work of reconciliation, the ministry of reconciliation, and the fulfillment of reconciliation. Ten pages long, the Confession of 1967 puts reconciliation among ourselves, and between us and God, at the very center of Christian faith and practice. This Confession serves us well in today's world, too.

Prayer: God of healing and hope, we thank You for Your call to a life of reconciliation, a new life in Christ, a new creation, a life of rebuilt trust, love and hope, as we look forward to the world that You are constantly creating before us. Amen.

Bob Reinovsky White Rock Presbyterian Church

The 4th Sunday in Lent, March 10

Forgiving Yourself as a Pathway to Reconciliation

As we think about reconciliation, forgiveness has to play a part. After all, if there has not been a breaking of relationship in some way, or for some reason, then reconciliation isn't necessary. So part of reconciliation has to be about giving forgiveness or receiving forgiveness from others and from God. But what about ourselves?

When I was in elementary school, we mercilessly bullied another boy. His name was Paul, but we called him Pauline, which, in hindsight, was not only homophobic but also misogynistic. I don't know why I went along with it when I knew it was wrong. Except what I also knew was that if Paul was being terrorized, then I wouldn't be the one on the receiving end, or, at least, it would be less. I went along to get along. To protect myself.

I have no idea what happened to Paul. I truly wonder if he made it out of his teen years alive. I can't be reconciled with Paul, or even seek his forgiveness, because I don't know where he is. I don't even know his last name to try and track him down. Those actions all those years ago are one of the things for which I struggle to forgive myself.

And yet, that weight I carry helps me understand what forgiveness and reconciliation not only mean, but what they feel like. Because even with that weight, even with those mistakes, I still know that God forgives me because I seek that forgiveness through genuine repentance. That reconciliation with God, through Christ, helps me to know that I am always more than the worst thing I have ever done, and that gives me the strength to keep working on forgiving myself while seeking reconciliation and forgiveness with others.

Prayer: God of forgiveness, help us to learn to forgive others and even ourselves, because You have first forgiven us. May Your love be felt and known as an abiding presence as we seek to be agents of reconciliation in the world. We pray this in Christ's holy name. Amen.

The Rev. John W. Nash First United Methodist Church

Monday, March 11

Just Talk

I was adopted when the adopting family's children were already out of the home. I have one surviving sister with whom I have a continuing cordial relationship, and one who is functionally estranged from me. We maybe text once or twice a year. Last Fall, the sister that I am in contact with informed me that the other sister had just lost her husband to a common infection. This was not expected. I texted my estranged sister my condolences.

I then composed a text to a friend that referred to my sister in an unflattering way (to show which woman I meant) and went on a short rant about how frustrating it was to lose someone to an infection that would have been very simple to treat if only he had been younger and healthier. Unfortunately, I mistakenly sent the text to the new widow. I was frantic, but nothing could be done. All I could do was text her an immediate apology. I also texted my friendly sister who just said, "Well, you are only human. Now all you can do is accept and deal with the consequences." After I sent out a sympathy card with another profuse apology, I waited for my sister to respond. A month later, I received a text from her, and was very scared and ashamed to open the text, fearing what she would have to say to me. All she did was ask for an explanation, and we proceeded to have a very productive conversation.

It occurred to me when I turned off my phone that I do the same thing with Jesus quite often. I realize that I have sinned in some way and, feeling guilty and ashamed, I don't seek him out in prayer, but avoid praying at all. After all, how could he forgive *this* thing? Whenever I do eventually reach out to him, I feel so much better. The comfort of a close relationship to my redeemer only comes when I reach out.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, please keep reminding me of your love and forgiveness. Help me to reach out for you often and especially when I feel the need for reconciliation with you. In your blessed Name, Amen.

Kay Dreamtrader
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Tuesday, March 12

Irreconcilable Differences

Irreconcilable differences can be found in many places—in marriages, relationships, workplaces, neighborhoods, and bank accounts. So many ideas, opinions, feelings, and funds that don't agree or balance out, so it causes conflict.

The definition of different is, "not the same as another or each other; unlike in nature, form, or quality." Differences clash, cause conflict, and can be hard to reconcile. And yet, look at all the different notes in music where, in one measure, the notes clash with such dissonance it causes one to wince, and, in another measure, the notes come together and resolve/reconcile into beautiful harmony.

How can we live so that our dissonance of feelings can be reconciled into beautiful harmony? Many things were created to be different, look different, and have the ability to do different things. We need to recognize that all things were created through God, and are gifts from God—but that doesn't guarantee that everything lives in harmony.

We needed an example, someone to show us that although we are all different, we are each respected and beloved. God came to us through Christ to provide an example of how to live with being different.

Differences—even irreconcilable differences—will always exist but let us note the difference and say it's okay. For when we see where the difference is and learn from it, things start to balance out.

Prayer: Let us pray... Lord, help us to see our differences, and say that being different is okay. Help us to treat each difference with respect and know that all are beloved by You. Amen.

Joyce Haven White Rock Presbyterian Church

Wednesday, March 13

Servants, Heirs, and Ministers

Was it any easier in Paul's era to hold the vision of reconciling hostile people than it is today in 2024?

The improbability of bringing into harmony the divisions among government figures, marketplace addicts, and diverse worshippers seems to end in efforts trying to impose order by force.

But order isn't what Paul was addressing. His words to the Corinthians are flaming with a different vision. His revelation from Jesus is inhabited by people who may look familiar but are actually new creations. His job descriptions for the members of the Body of Christ don't fall into categories we're used to. He sees servants, committed to the Servant Savior. He sees wealth not as gold or power, but as riches available now to servants in an entirely new Kingdom. He sees heirs of a fabulous inheritance, co-heirs with the one who paid for it with his life and death on earth. And, instead of a hierarchy of positions with rank and privilege, Paul says God gave his imperfect—but forgiven—children the ministry of reconciliation, learning by doing what Jesus did, and learning from him how to see deeper beyond the outer distasteful enemy into the heart of one precious to Jesus.

Lent—looking into our true self. The Cross—Reconciliation. Easter—Life in Christ, and Christ in us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, by the power of Your Spirit, will You use our willing hearts to teach us to become ministers? In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Marilyn Stevens
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Thursday, March 14

"We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

(2 Corinthians 5:20b, NIV)

Be Reconciled

I'm the church treasurer, and it is very important to reconcile the accounts each month. It might even be said this is the golden rule of accounting, because, if the accounts are not being reconciled regularly, this is the first indication of a bookkeeper problem. The goal with reconciling the accounts is to examine what we think is in the bank account and what truly is in the bank account, and make sure it agrees. If it doesn't agree, one finds the disagreement and corrects the problem. Oh, how I love numbers—so easy to identify errors and correct those problems.

As I compare the bank account to what I think is in it, 2 Corinthians 5:20 is asking us to be reconciled to God; a process of our working toward agreement with God. I find this very telling. Paul isn't asking us to reconcile ourselves to each other or to those other people with whom we disagree. He is asking us to reconcile ourselves to God. And reconciliation is so much easier with God, as Paul states that God has already forgiven us our sinscorrected those errors of ours by Christ's sacrifice. All we need to do is work on that process of being in agreement with God.

From our reconciliation with God, it will follow that all others who also work at that same reconciliation with God will also be reconciled with each other. Not necessarily agree with each other—because we aren't numbers. But we will have God in common, through Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for Your gracious kindness, loving mercy, and patience with all of us. Thank You for reconciling the world back to yourself through Jesus. Help us to be a witness to Your world by living a life of reconciliation. Amen.

Ann Cooke
The United Church of Los Alamos

Friday, March 15

I'm Sorry...

It's a common situation for parents to teach their children to behave kindly to others. Sometimes, a mother might ask her child to say "I'm sorry" when they have taken a toy from another child. You know the forced sorry that a kid says that might not sound very sincere. The child says sorry, but the mother explains further why they should share. It takes a while to understand sharing.

Sometimes we have to say I'm sorry before we have really processed the situation and are ready to forgive or be forgiven. God knows if my "sorry" is truly heart felt. I also think God is okay with me using the word sorry while I am working on my heart to truly mean it. Just like the mother teaching her child to share, it's the first step. God can work with that.

Prayer: Lord, I'm sorry! I'm sorry for my selfishness, for my judgement of others, for my self-centered thoughts. I love that You know my heart and patiently lead me. I ask You to open my heart to truly being sorry, not just in words! Amen.

Lynn Kluegel First United Methodist Church

Saturday, March 16

Regard No One According to the Flesh

There is a stark contrast between those who have not become a new creation, viewing others according to the flesh (short, tall, skinny, fat, attractive, unattractive, smart, dumb, etc.), and looking at the flesh to form their opinion. Compared to a born-again individual, who looks upon a person with compassion, and sees a child of God past the outward appearance to the light within.

In the show "The Chosen", there is an opportunity for Nicodemos to meet Jesus. Jesus tries to explain to Nicodemos that he must be born again to inherit the kingdom of God. The dialog is poignant. Nicodemos remarked that if he must enter his mother's womb that would be a problem, as she had passed away. His focus was on the flesh first, the Spirit a distant second. Nicodemos' heart was open and searching, his spirit awakened and leading him to reconcile with God.

When a person becomes a new creation, he is led step-by-step by the Spirit. Old things, needs, attitudes, judgements, and expectations pass away, and, behold, all things become new. A new heart starts to form like within the Grinch. Before you know it, this new person smiles more, lingers longer to listen, and talks less about himself and more about those beautiful God moments. You begin to see an inward security grow because of the knowledge that God loves him as well as the ones around him so very much. He has become reconciled to God. I've heard people randomly remark at moments like that, "I want what he has."

Prayer: Dear God, fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Remove the old ways of the flesh and awaken in me a loving tenderness for all people. In Jesus' most Holy name. Amen.

Susan Sprake
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

The 5th Sunday in Lent, March 17

Fully and Utterly Beloved

According to etymonline.com, "reconcile" comes from the Latin reconciliare and means "bring together again, restore to union and friendship after estrangement" (re: again; + conciliare: make friendly).

I'm struck by the "again" part, the restore part, especially in the context of our passage—and especially with Paul's ending plea: "Be reconciled to God." At the risk of spouting heresy, I believe we begin our lives in full union with God. In a state of full and utter belovedness [not a state of cursed depravity as some espouses].

And then we begin to live...and we are wounded. We begin to doubt that innate belovedness, and our union with God becomes separation. Our friendship with God becomes estrangement. We begin to live from a place of not-good-enough, and self-judgment, and doubting our worth.

Living from within that place in relationship to ourselves, we also live from that place in relationship with others, viewing them, too, as not-goodenough, judging them, and doubting their worth.

Perhaps that is sin? In Jesus, God seems to be saying to the world, "Come back! Your sin is forgiven! Nothing needs to keep you from returning to full union with me. Come back and claim your birthright as my beloved!" As we do that, as we re-claim our fundamental belovedness, we move away from self-judgment and self-doubt, and toward self-acceptance and union with God. Re-union with God. A re-storing of our friendship with God. Reconciliare. We are reconciled with God. An indescribable gift that's ours for the taking. But not until we truly receive it can we truly share it. First we must receive it. Will we?

Prayer: Holy God, open our spirits to our belovedness that we might be restored to full union with You, that we might witness to the power of reconciliation in the world. Amen.

The Rev. Deb Beloved Church White Rock Presbyterian Church

Monday, March 18

If Any Man Is In Christ

Having read Job, haven't we discovered (like the Prodigal Son) that fathers die, marriages and friendships break, and we have fires, genocide, crop failures, and leukemia or Alzheimer's? We come out of Egypt, don't we? Out of our pigsty to find that God isn't going to tweak history to make it all work out. God seems helpless before it all.

No. That's not it. God has a self-imposed limitation to give our responsibility the room to run so that our freedom is real. Consider the father of the Prodigal Son. His wayward son comes home, spent, crushed, and acknowledging his failure. The father was waiting for God knows how long for his return. Reconciliation. A banquet. But, that was not all. The elder son sulks, and the good father assures him as well. All that I have is yours (Luke 15:31).

This is what we must spread: the message of reconciliation. We are part of a global village. We have to reconcile, bridge gaps, birth hope, revive love, and create sharing. We can no longer be a people who go to church and go home – like a housecat or like the Hebrews in the wilderness. More than any other sign, serving outside of ourselves symbolizes we have quit the manna. We are called to exit our stained-glass church walls. As we are reconciled, let us be tigers of faith to reconcile with fellow travelers and begin to feed on the food of God's promised land.

Inspired by Thomas H. Conley, **The Pulpit of Northside Drive Baptist Church**, Marietta, GA, Vol. 5, March 16, 1980.

Prayer: Give us today our daily bread – that we may share it. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. Amen.

Jim Cobble

The United Church of Los Alamos

Tuesday, March 19

Write an Apology!

"You will never look into the eyes of someone God does not love"

Unattributed quote from Facebook

This quote appeared just after I had sent the text that I would write a Lenten meditation, and I knew it was meant for me. We had a person in our church with whom I'd had continual disagreements, sometimes really angry and ugly—to the point that I dreaded meeting him under any occasion. One night, after a particularly unpleasant exchange, I was abruptly awakened with the message "Write an apology!!"

That was startling, as I was sure that I was the injured one. However, the message was so definite that the next morning, I got up, wrote a message saying that I was so sorry about the incident, knew that I had hurt him, and really regretted my part in it. I then baked a dozen hot-cross buns (It was Holy Saturday), got in my car, and left my tribute on his steps—too cowardly to ring the doorbell.

I never had any response, but I never had another unpleasant encounter. And, strangely, that was enough. I didn't need an apology from him. I had done what God wanted me to do, because I had hurt a creature that God loved.

Prayer: Dear God, we confess that we have sinned against You by what we have done and by what we have left undone. Have mercy on us and forgive us. Amen.

Jo Moore
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Wednesday, March 20

Two Sides

I remember a period of time when I was working hard on forgiving people in my life who had harmed me. For some reason, I felt the need to send an email to one of those people to let him know I'd forgiven him. He emailed me back, saying, "I forgive you, too." I scoffed. I thought, "He hurt me!" Later, I decided perhaps he was being sarcastic. Days later, when my anger, hurt, and surprise subsided, I realized I truly hurt him as well. God reminded me I need forgiveness, too. There are two sides to every story. We truly need to wait until we can think calmly and consider the situation from all perspectives. Many times I speak or act too quickly. Afterwards, I realize it would have been better if I had taken the time to think it through. At times, I hurt people I love, maybe even more often than the people I don't love. I try to humbly ask for forgiveness. I hope the people I'm in relationship with can remember when they needed forgiveness, too. Thankfully, I know God always forgives me. I rest on the promise that He accepts me as I am, sins, mistakes, and all!

Prayer: Father God, You are the creator of relationships. You show us how to love. Help us to hear Your voice telling us the best way to speak and act in our relationships. May we always reflect You in all we do. Please show us how to be Your light in the world. Amen.

Camille Sackett-Wescott
First United Methodist Church

Thursday, March 21

Ambassadors for Christ

As a youth, I spent two years in North Africa while my father served in the State Department's USAID program. Ambassadors came and went on the periphery of my young life. I was intrigued and impressed by the amount of "work" that was accomplished on terraces bubbling with wisteria blossoms, or at dinners where every fork and spoon had its proper place on the table.

In this Lenten season, as I thought about being Christ's ambassador, I turned to the website of the National Museum of American Diplomacy to explore this analog of being an ambassador, a representative of Christian reconciliation. Marcia Bernicat, the Director of the Foreign Service, explains the role of an ambassador in a video on the website. Three of her practices hit home for me. She states:

- 1. We do our homework before we go.
- 2. We reach out to as many of our predecessors as we can.
- 3. We interact with as many in the host country as we can.

So that's my cue card for this act of reconciliation as Christ's ambassador.

- 1. I need to do my homework what was Jesus up to? How can I emulate it? Study scripture! Learn the "language" and the lay of the land in which I'm living!
- 2. Who else has studied this? What "best practices" can I follow up on in my own life? What role models give me courage? What protocols shall I follow?
- 3. If I'm going to be an ambassador for Christ, I'd better get busy out there in my host country, sharing/showing the reconciling love of Christ in every action.

Prayer: God, send us out to be Christ's ambassadors, prepared by our faith, sustained by the cloud of witnesses who have preceded us and sensitive to the needs and norms of those around us. Bless our journey in Christ's name. Amen.

Laura Loving
The United Church of Los Alamos

Friday, March 22

Love One Another

In a time when there is so much division and lack of helpful communication, reconciliation seems hard to imagine. I believe it begins with a true spirit of humility and love. Jesus came with a humility and grace that is hard to imagine. He who walked in heaven came to walk on earth to make a way for us to be reconciled to God. As we have been reconciled to God, so He has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. What a privilege and a challenge. This cannot be accomplished unless there is a true spirit of humility and love.

There is also a need of forgiveness. Sometimes hurts are so difficult to bear it is hard to forgive, but, with God's help, we can forgive. I have discovered that it is even possible to forgive when the person has not said "I'm sorry". I believe the following words of Mother Theresa say far better than I can what reconciliation is all about. It is all about our relationship with God and how that plays out in our life:

"People are often unreasonable and self-centered. Forgive them anyway."

If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are honest, people may cheat you. Be honest anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway.

For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant to us, Your people, the ability to live our lives loving others as Jesus loved us, walking in a spirit of reconciliation we can share with the world

Virginia Norman
White Rock United Methodist Church

Saturday, March 23

Forgiveness

Years ago, our church had an interim pastor. Most in our congregation loved this man—his stories, sermons, and sense of humor. Everyone, but me! I did not like him. Everything about him annoyed and irritated me. I was not very nice to him, even to the point of being rude at times.

I felt terribly guilty for how I was acting toward him, but not enough to change. Eventually, the Holy Spirit began to convict me. I came to realize that I was angry and grieving the loss of a treasured former pastor, and that I was taking my anger out on this new pastor. I needed to apologize and ask forgiveness from this man, but I was terrified. With a stomach full of knots and knees shaking, I set up a meeting to speak with the pastor. I needn't have been worried. The pastor not only forgave me, but told me I didn't need his forgiveness because he understood I was grieving. We prayed and cried together. I left feeling a huge weight lifted off of me. Not only was the relationship restored, it was transformed to a new and beautiful friendship that I am thankful for even today. Asking forgiveness was a huge step in my relationship with God. God gave me a glimpse of who He is and what He wants for us — "to forgive one another, as I have forgiven you". And, in return, He reconciled Himself to us, and we are created new in Him.

Prayer: Thank you God for Your faithfulness and love. Help us to hear Your quiet promptings and seek reconciliation with one another, and, in turn, You will restore our relationships and give us a glimpse of what is to come. Amen.

Tammy Moore
Child of God needing Reconciliation
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Palm Sunday, March 24

Ambassadors

The word "ambassador" at first glance may conjure an image of a regal figure working on behalf of a foreign country. A lobbyist, an influencer, or a person with swagger and power may come to mind. Brands have ambassadors. They pitch people who represent the product and cast the product in a favorable light. In our context today, we are implored to be an ambassador for Christ—a representative—a person who embodies the traits and characteristics that best exemplify Jesus. I can hardly imagine a weightier responsibility on this Palm Sunday morning. We are asked to be the walking, talking, and living embodiments of Christ.

The crowds that are gathered in the Palm Sunday story and the euphoria of the moment is not hard to see. We watch enough sporting events and entertainment to understand how easy it is to audibly hear the Hosannas. The spectacle of the Super Bowl is not so far behind in our memory, and March Madness comes to a completion in a week. What is hard for me to imagine is myself as a crowd member as Christ passes by on Sunday, and also being a part of the mob shouting for his death on Friday. To be an Ambassador for Christ is to be true to the ministry of the one in whom we profess our faith. When we strive to accomplish that goal, we take a step away from those who turn their backs on Christ in the Passion story.

Prayer: Eternal God, we can imagine the palms waving and the loud shouts of "Hosanna" as Jesus enters into the city of Jerusalem. We also know that those shouting praise will shout "crucify him" in just a few days. Help us to live each day in a manner that reflects our faith in Christ and shows love to each person we encounter. Understanding that we are called to be ambassadors for Jesus, give us strength in moments of weakness, courage in times of doubt, and the ability to follow through as we proclaim The Good News... "The Gospel" of Jesus Christ to the world. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Amen.

The Rev. Keith Lewis
The United Church of Los Alamos

Monday of Holy Week, March 25

Reconciliation

How do I tell you about reconciliation with God when I didn't know I needed reconciliation? We moved to the country, and every day when my 9-year-old got off the bus, he seemed to be unhappy. He was "champing at the bit", and I always barked back at him. How could I talk to that child? I read all the books and went to all the seminars about how to be the best mother, but nothing had worked for me with Lee. Then, one day when he came in yelling, I yelled back, making him angry and he stormed to his room. "Oh God", I said, "how can I love this child"? Strangely I heard, Tell him you are sorry for yelling and would like to just talk. This voice in my head is telling me what to do? Is this God? I knocked on his door, and, when he opened it, I told him I was sorry I had yelled at him, I had no right to do that, and that I would just like to talk. He looked at me with questioning eyes but nodded. I found out that day what he was upset about, and every day after that I asked God to quiet me so I could hear my child. It was not perfect, but things got better, and we could say things to each other. It was only later that I felt humble, and I thanked God for His message to me. Why did I wait so long to hear "His voice" in my head? What joy I have, and praise to Him!

Prayer: O God, You are so good to me, and I want to know You more even here at my old age. I thank you this day and always. Amen.

Shiela Enemark
First United Methodist Church

Tuesday of Holy Week, March 26

A Change of Heart

Years ago, when I was seeking ordination, I was under the authority of someone in the church who I thought of as a tyrant. I was a faithful member of the congregation. I volunteered many hours a week. I was a successful youth leader. I was doing everything right. And yet, he kept putting roadblocks in my way. So, for months on end, I found myself praying for God to move his heart.

One day, as I was saying my prayers, something happened that took me utterly by surprise. I got to the part of my prayers in which I asked God to "move his heart," and I heard, as clear as if someone were speaking right next to me, *Not his heart, your heart*.

You could have knocked me over with the proverbial feather. My heart? What did my heart have to do with anything? I was in the right. I was doing everything asked of me, and more. But the insistence with which those words came through to me - your heart - didn't diminish. So reluctantly, I started praying again, this time asking God to move my heart.

Later that morning, I saw my perceived nemesis. I approached him and said, "I'm really sorry things have been going so poorly between us." And, for the second time that morning, I felt myself utterly gob smacked. He said, "Mary Ann, I am not your enemy, but I have been stupid."

After that day, things began to change.

A year later, I started seminary.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came to reconcile us to God and to one another. Give us the courage to let you mold and shape our hearts to be like yours. In your name we pray. Amen.

The Rev. Mary Ann Hill Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Wednesday of Holy Week, March 27

Spread the New

"We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us;" As Christ's hands and voice, we must believe that, to phrase it in a different way, the past no longer exists. With Christ, the whole of creation is new and is now.

The word "appeal" means that God really, really wants connection. This restoration with us. Appeal is not casual, like a take it or leave it. God wants to be in us, around us, above and below us right now. But not just us. As ambassadors, we make this appeal to everyone with whom we come in contact. As one "in Christ", we can, with confidence, tell everyone that they can also live in Christ as new creations, leaving the "past" behind and becoming ambassadors themselves.

Aren't we always running into people who worry about something bad that has happened, and they haven't been able to let it go? Or what about the "nones" who left God, and the spiritual tradition of their youth, who no longer experience connection with a loving Creator?

Here, today, right now is your opportunity. Because you live in the "now," and the "past" no longer exists. Reconciliation with God evolves and renews again and again. This ambassador job you have been given has one main purpose: spread the new.

Prayer: Lord Christ, help me to put away my former way of life, my old self, and to be renewed in the spirit of my mind, clothing myself with the new, and be created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (From Ephesians 4:23-24)

Joe Cox
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Maundy Thursday, March 28

Reconciliation?

"God has given us the ministry of reconciliation". What an amazing trust that puts in each of us.

What would reconciliation look like? What would it require of us? The Isaiah scripture portraying the peaceable kingdom gives us an image of what true reconciliation could look like. In bringing about such a vision, we would need to grow in acceptance and respect for each other. It is not our job to change others to meet our personal definition of acceptability. Driving away those who, we believe, could pose a danger to us does not bring about true community either. Acting from fear, rather than love, will not be a successful strategy. In this scripture, the creatures have not melded into an indistinguishable mélange but, in their individuality, have learned to live together. The reconciliation we are called to experience should create the community presented in the richly-colored, highly-textured, and varied tapestry presented by the Peaceable Kingdom. May we thread our way through the many tangles in life to your vision.

Prayer: Gracious all-knowing God, guide us in focusing on Your all-encompassing love, lest we slip into excluding those You have given us to partner with. Amen

Selma Reinovsky
White Rock Presbyterian Church

Good Friday, March 29

²⁷"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27-28,[29-36])

On Love and Enemies

It is in this scripture's simplicity that the truth cuts us like a knife. Jesus' voice rings out from Mount Tibor and strikes us in our time and place.

It is in the turning away from the people who beg from me in the streets or more ephemerally in my life. It is the love for my friends, but not the people who fill up my inbox with hateful things, I see my own shame.

In shame, I try to blunt the truth's cutting edge. It is not that I do not have — I live in abundance. It is that, in treating those enemies in love, I know I would be transformed. It is a fear too that we are similar, and that I see wicked and ungratefulness in myself along with them.

Love is not a feeling here. This is a love, Jesus tells us, of people who are under oppression. Who have much to fear. This is a love of the material kind – our own clothes, our hearts, our time, our money, our Earth, and our collective good. This commandment, while harsh, offers us comfort that there is a way forward. A way to reconcile our greatest divides. Simply, or not, to love our enemies.

Prayer: Merciful God, we ask that You open our hearts to find love for our enemies, not in sentiment, but in the flesh and blood. May this love transform us, so we may do good, give freely and make our enemies beloved. Let us do to others as we would have them do to us. Amen.

Danielle Prokop
White Rock United Methodist Church

Holy Saturday, March 30

Holy Saturday

The pressure's on! It's the day before Easter, and I haven't yet accomplished the work of reconciliation I intended when Lent began. I haven't made peace with the people I might have. I have left undone. Those things which I ought to have done and I have done those things which I ought not to have done. To resurrect the ancient words of prayer, "How can I be reconciled to God?"

Taking this Holy Saturday panic seriously, I decide on a spontaneous ritual of reconciliation. I head outside and gather a handful of rocks—some smooth stones, some rough shards, and some veined fragments. I tumble them around in the cradle of my hands to let the dust and dirt wear off. Inside, I am thinking about people with whom I have loose ends, unfinished conversations, unspoken apologies, and lingering grudges. I tumble those names around in my head as a clumsy prayer, wondering how I can make peace with the past and live fully into resurrection hope and forgiveness. Then, in a gesture of—what? Surrender? Hope? Resignation? Offering? Openness? I crack open my hold on those stones, and, one by one, place them in front of me. I give each one a name, a face, and a memory of some unfinished reconciliation. One is my grade school nemesis, one is the boss who fired me, one is the relative I resent, one is the stranger who cut me off, with each rock sitting in front of me. Judging me? Giving me a chance to reconcile? To forgive that person? To forgive myself? One by one, I confront the unfinished holy business. Each by each, I feel a lifting of the load I carry. When I get to the last stone, my private liturgy has come to an end. And I realize, it's almost time for the Big Stone to be rolled away, for the Master of Forgiveness to set us free, for the sighing sound of relief, and rest after reconciliation.

Prayer: God, pry from our hands these stones that we grasp so tightly. Lead us to the healing place of reconciliation. Help us let go of the past, to make peace with those we may have hurt, offended, or left behind. Roll these stones away from us. Amen.

Laura Loving
The United Church of Los Alamos

Easter Sunday, March 31

Friends

Friends are so significant in my life, and I use the word "friend" for everyone, from the person I just met, to a helpful person at a store, or someone who has known me before my frontal cortex was formed (you know, those important high school friends:)). Some Bible concordances even note that Jesus uses the term "friend" in 139 occurrences.

One of the most painful breaks in a friendship was with Tania, my very dear friend in graduate school. We were both getting our master's degree in social work, and we were placed in an internship at a special education school in the Baltimore area. We became instant friends on our first day. We were inseparable and so amazingly compatible, and it is an understatement to say I would never have made it through the year without her. After our year together, a position opened for a full-time social work position, and we both applied. I got the job, and our friendship ended. My heart was broken. I told her that I would turn down the offer if it meant saving our friendship. She said it was just too painful. Why was she not chosen? The space in this broken time was long. The tears I cried were many.

What I learned in that time was that we often lose our focus of relationships by thinking other things are important: who gets a job, how much money is made, what caste level you are from, what politics you identify with, the color of one's skin, or the level of education.

In this journey of reconciliation, God has a strong desire for all of us to be reconciled to God and with each other. The good news is that Tania and I did reconcile, and the further good news is that God invites us to find that reconciliation in all our relationships. Ask yourself this question: Is it more important to be right, or to be in relationship? Careful dear Los Alamos residents, the question may not be logical.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for teaching us how to be reconciled. May we be Your ambassadors for that reconciliation wherever we go. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Pastor Nicolé Raddu Ferry
Child of God doing the best she can, and Senior Pastor
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Additional Scriptures to Consider

Genesis 50:15-21 Joseph Forgives His Brothers
Isaiah 11:6-9The Peaceable Kingdom
Psalm 133 Dwelling in Unity
Matthew 5:23-24 Be Reconciled
Luke 6:27-36Love Your Enemies
Luke 15:11-31 The Prodigal Son
Ephesians 2:11-22One in Christ
Ephesians 4:1-6Unity in Christ
Colossians 1:19-20 Reconciled to God
Colossians 3:12-17 Clothe Yourselves in Love
1 John 4:7-12Love One Another
1 Peter 3:8-12Seek Peace and Pursue It

Food Donation Centers in Los Alamos:

Little Food Pantry at Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Outside Shop on the Corner; lower-level parking lot; At Canyon and Diamond Dr.

Food Pantry at Unitarian Church

Sage near 15th St; Bear proof collection box.

LA Cares Food Distribution

Needs money and food donations.

Tel: 505-661-8015 for large pick-ups and messages.

Website: www.lacaresnm.org

PayPal Donations: lacaresnm@gmail.com

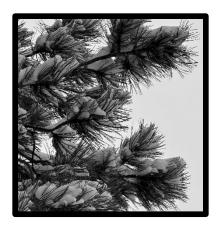
Donations of money: LA Cares, PO Box 248, Los Alamos, NM 87544 **Donations of Food**: Nonperishable canned goods (Large bottles of juice, canned vegetables, canned Meat, canned soups, healthy cereals, healthy snacks, Mac & Cheese, pasta other than spaghetti, 4lb bags of sugar, Tuna or Chicken Helpers, laundry detergent, personal care products (bars of soap, shampoo, deodorant), paper goods, cleaning supplies.

<u>Not needed:</u> rice, peanut butter, flour, bottled water, toothpaste. No glass containers.

First United Methodist Church: Leave food donations in shopping basket inside front door or on bench outside door. Sends food to LA Cares.

Walkup Aquatic Center: Inside front door, leave food items in barrel for LA Cares.





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