

⊕ LIVING COMPASS

Living Well Through Lent 2022



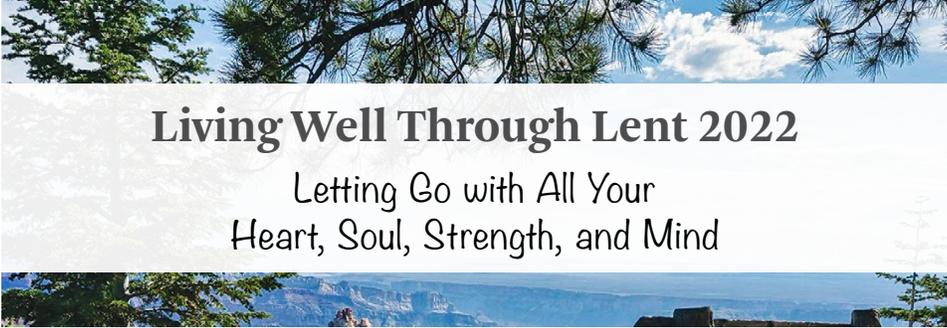
*Letting Go with All Your Heart,
Soul, Strength, and Mind*

A Living Compass Seasonal Resource

Join Our Facebook Lent Retreat Group & Sign Up for Our Daily Devotional Emails

Are there others with whom you might want to share this Lent journey through this devotional booklet? Following are two additional ways you, and others, can deepen your experience of Lent.

Visit us at LivingCompass.org/Lent to learn more or to sign up.



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Lent Facebook Retreat Group
We would like to invite you to join our Lent Facebook retreat group. If you participate in this private group, you will be enriched by your interactions with hundreds of others who are also reading this devotional.

Daily Devotional Emails
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Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative was created with a generous gift from Ab and Nancy Nicholas. While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to inspire us and make this resource possible.

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- We also have a free downloadable Facilitator Guide on our website.
- Find us on the web: livingcompass.org
- Questions? Email us: info@livingcompass.org



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About the Writers



Robbin Brent is the director of Publications and Resource Development for Living Compass, a spiritual director, founder of Wisdom Way of Knowing, and the former director of the Center for Spiritual Resources in NC. Robbin is an experienced leader of spiritual retreats and programs, facilitates global gatherings of contemplative leaders, and is a graduate of Shalem Institute's Transforming Community and Spiritual Guidance programs. She loves spending time with her family, hiking, and enjoying early morning coffee and the wildlife that graces her backyard.

The Rt. Rev. Brian Cole has served as the 5th Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee since 2017. A native of Missouri, he is a graduate of Murray State University and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, both in Kentucky. Brian is married to Susan Weatherford, who is a yoga instructor and poet. They have one son, Jess, and one dog, Jerry Lee. Before becoming bishop, Brian served in parishes in North Carolina and Kentucky. The son of an English teacher, Brian finds joy each day by rising early to spend time with poetry.

Amy Cook has served as a diocesan faith formation leader in the Episcopal Dioceses of California and Massachusetts. She loves to help others get excited about their faith, ask questions, and explore where their passions meet God's call to becoming Beloved Community. She loves walking alongside adult learners in discerning God's call in their lives, and walking with children and youth as they discover new truths about God's love and becoming part of a faith community. Participating in community theater as an actor, costumer, and director brings Amy joy, and she loves doing it all with her wonderful husband Ron.



Dr. Sarah Robinson Flick is a psychiatrist, spiritual director, and writer who lives in the Houston/Galveston area. She has offered spiritual direction for fifteen years to clergy and others, and has facilitated retreats for church and community groups. She completed training in mind-body medicine and in spiritual direction. Sarah is the author of *Desire, Mystery, Belonging*, a book exploring patterns of our spiritual journey. She is interested in the evolving intersection of spirituality, health, and community, and she loves spending time with her husband Bob, an Episcopal priest, and their daughter Katie, a nursing student.

The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski is an Episcopal priest, wellness coach, licensed marriage and family therapist in private practice, and works part time with the Living Compass team. Jan and Dennis have been married for 42 years. Between the families of their four adult sons, they are blessed with nine grandchildren who are the absolute joys of their lives. Gardening, dancing, knitting, and sipping almond milk lattes are also a source of life and joy for Jan.

William “Father Bill” Miller is an Episcopal priest and the author of *The Gospel According to Sam*, *The Beer Drinker’s Guide to God*, and *The Last Howlelujah*. He is the founder of Saint Cecilia’s, a creative spiritual community, and Free Bird Ranch Ministries. He lives in Round Top, Texas, with his lovely wife Sandy and five lively dogs. Learn more at Fatherbill.net, [Facebook.com/Williammillerauthor](https://www.facebook.com/Williammillerauthor), or subscribe to his “Spirituality for Real People” e-inspiration at <http://bit.ly/JoinFatherBill>.



The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner—founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative—has served his community for more than 30 years as an Episcopal priest, retreat leader, licensed marriage and family therapist, and author. In addition to his coaching and psychotherapy work, he leads wellness retreats for organizations and leadership teams. Scott has been married to Holly Hughes Stoner for 41 years and together they are the co-creators of *The Teen Compass* and the *Parent Wellness Compass*. In his free time, Scott loves cycling, running, and soccer, and spending time with family, especially with his two grandsons.

The Rev. Mary Bea Sullivan is the author of *Living the Way of Love*, a retreat leader, and spiritual director. She loves sharing stories and aspires to listen devoutly to life—to people, nature, and the stirrings of the Spirit. Mary Bea lives in Birmingham, Alabama, with her husband, Malcolm Marler. They love hiking in the woods and cycling on the roads. She is passionate about family and savors time with Malcolm, their two adult children, Brendan and Kiki, their beloved dogs, Beau and Grace, and her large extended family.

The Rev. Benjamin Thomas is a seeker and teacher dedicated to strengthening contemplative wisdom from within the Church, and currently serves as associate rector at St. Gregory’s Episcopal Church in Boca Rotan, Florida. Prior to ordained ministry, he worked in social entrepreneurship in New York City, and his poetry has appeared in the *Anglican Theological Review* and the *Sewanee Theological Review*. Learn more at frbenjaminthomas.com, or subscribe to his newsletter at <https://bit.ly/3mY9bBB>. He loves writing, yoga, and international travel. He and his wife, Anna, have five beautiful children and enjoy laughter and life by the sea.



The Rev. Edward Thompson currently serves as Middle School chaplain, and teaches 8th-grade theology at St. Stephen's Episcopal School in Austin, Texas. Before that, he served parishes in Liberia, Wisconsin, the US Virgin Islands, Louisiana, and Texas. Born, raised, and educated in Liberia and Wisconsin, he is married to Vashti J Collins and they have four children and one grandchild. Ed finds joy in serving with and mentoring young people, in offering pastoral care for all ages, and is always excited about learning new things through reading and traveling.

Liz Ward has served as program staff for Shalem Institute for over twenty years, and as Program Director of the Shalem Spiritual Guidance Program for 12 years until she retired in 2021. She has prayerfully listened as a spiritual guide at Virginia Theological Seminary for over 25 years, and is also a seasoned retreat and pilgrimage leader. She loves wandering the world learning from other cultures, engaging with the great hearts and minds shimmering through the arts, delighting in flowers, gardening, and backyard birds, and singing, dancing, and playing with her two beloved grandchildren.

The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative: A Brief Overview

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative offers us guidance in four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. Just like a mobile or kinesthetic art, these dimensions are interconnected—movement in one area affects all the others. We are not compartmentalized people. Whatever impacts one area of our lives (positively or negatively) has an impact on the other areas. Each of the four quadrants focuses on two areas of well-being, and each of the eight areas helps to guide and equip us as we commit to being more intentional about the way we live our lives. The purpose of this Compass is to provide a dynamic resource that will assist us in our search for balance and wellness. Our call is to live an undivided life, where heart, soul, strength, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*.

Areas of Wellness

Heart

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.
- **Handling Emotions.** The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.

Soul

- **Spirituality.** The ability to connect with a higher purpose in life and to have a clear set of beliefs, morals, and values that guides our actions.
- **Rest and Play.** The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.

Strength

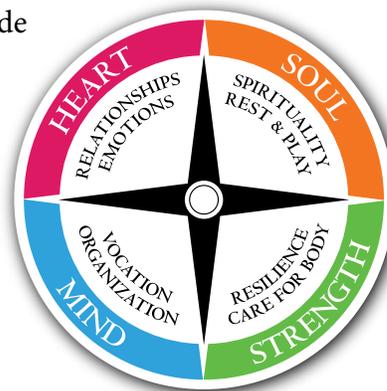
- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.
- **Care for the Body.** The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.



Mind

- **Vocation.** The ability to align our life's purpose with the gifts and talents we've been given. This includes work, volunteer service, and any educational/enrichment pursuits.
- **Organization.** The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of spirituality and wellness is what makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we intentionally choose the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that “health,” “healing,” “wholeness,” and “holy” all come from the same root word “hal” or “haelen.”



The Living Compass

Introduction

Lent is a time for introspection and self-reflection, a time to reflect on the core of what it means to live a Christian life in the midst of great change and uncertainty. When facing change and uncertainty, few practices are more central to that life than letting go so that we are freer to receive the gifts God has to offer us.

We are delighted that you have chosen to use our 2022 Lenten devotional to assist you on your own journey. And we are honored to have ten guest writers to help us reflect on this year's theme of *Letting Go with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*. Their diverse and rich voices encourage us to understand that in order to prepare for the new life of Easter, we need to be intentional about discerning what it truly means to let go with our whole being.

As important as are the daily readings in this devotional, even more significant will be the reflections and insights that emerge in response to the readings. We encourage you to record them, either in the spaces provided, or in a separate journal. To help you to more deeply connect with what holds value and meaning at this time in your life, we have included four spiritual prayer practices on pp. 78-80 that you can engage with if that appeals to you. When possible, join or start a group (both in person and virtual work well for this) where you can discuss your thoughts with others. Our Facilitator Guide provides additional guidance on how to use this devotional when hosting small-group reflection and conversation.

I would also like to invite you to join our Lenten Facebook retreat group. If you participate in this private online group, you will be enriched by your interactions with hundreds of others who are also reading this devotional. Additionally, we are offering an opportunity to have the reflections from this devotional emailed to you each day during Lent. See the inside front cover for more information.

It is an honor to walk with you on the journey through Lent toward Easter.



The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner
Director, Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Ministry Initiative

The Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Lent 2022

Lent Year C	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
Ash Wednesday March 2, 2022	Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12	Psalm 51:1-17	2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10	Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21
First Sunday in Lent March 6, 2022	Deuteronomy 26:1-11	Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16	Romans 10:8b-13	Luke 4:1-13
Second Sunday in Lent March 13, 2022	Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18	Psalm 27	Philippians 3:17-4:1	Luke 13:31-35 or Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)
Third Sunday in Lent March 20, 2022	Isaiah 55:1-9	Psalm 63:1-8	1 Corinthians 10:1-13	Luke 13:1-9
Fourth Sunday in Lent March 27, 2022	Joshua 5:9-12	Psalm 32	2 Corinthians 5:16-21	Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32
Fifth Sunday in Lent April 3, 2022	Isaiah 43:16-21	Psalm 126	Philippians 3:4b-14	John 12:1-8
Liturgy of the Palms April 10, 2022 <i>Sixth Sunday in Lent</i>		Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29		Luke 19:28-40

Holy Week Year C	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
Monday of Holy Week April 11, 2022	Isaiah 42:1-9	Psalm 36:5-11	Hebrews 9:11-15	John 12:1-11
Tuesday of Holy Week April 12, 2022	Isaiah 49:1-7	Psalm 71:1-14	1 Corinthians 1:18-31	John 12:20-36
Wednesday of Holy Week April 13, 2022	Isaiah 50:4-9a	Psalm 70	Hebrews 12:1-3	John 13:21-32
Maundy Thursday April 14, 2022	Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14	Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19	1 Corinthians 11:23-26	John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Good Friday April 15, 2022	Isaiah 52:13-53:12	Psalm 22	Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9	John 18:1-19:42
Holy Saturday April 16, 2022	Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24	Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16	1 Peter 4:1-8	Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42
Resurrection of the Lord April 17, 2022 <i>Easter Day</i>	*Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25	Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24	1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43	John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

Living Compass has also published, *Vivir una buena Cuaresma en el 2022: Soltar y dejar ir con todo el corazón, alma, fuerzas y mente*—a Spanish Lenten devotional with completely original content. To learn more or to order, visit livingcompass.org/lent. Questions? Contact us: info@livingcompass.org.



Ways to Use
Living Well Through Lent 2022
A Personal Devotional and a Lenten Program

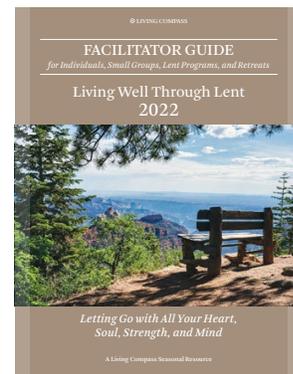
This devotional is intended to be used for daily personal reflection as we journey through Lent. We begin each Sunday with a reflection written by one of our guest writers. Every other day of the week begins with Scripture or a quote, followed by a reflection, and then “Making it Personal” questions, which offer an opportunity for you to reflect on the readings as they relate to your own life and spiritual journey. You might want to write down important thoughts, feelings, or insights, so we encourage you to purchase a journal to use as a companion to this devotional.

This resource can also be used as the basis for a church Lenten program, and we have created a free downloadable Facilitator Guide for group use, available on our website: LivingCompass.org/Lent.

The devotional is perfect as a resource for a half- or full-day Lenten retreat (more on this in the Lent Facilitator Guide). Giving each person a copy of this devotional (either printed or as a PDF, available for free on our website) would ensure that the experience of the retreat would stay with them throughout the remainder of Lent.

We are excited to offer two additional options for engaging this material. The reflections will be available as a daily email that you can subscribe to, and we will be hosting a private online Lenten retreat group based on this resource during Lent on Facebook. You can learn more about both of these resource offerings on our website: LivingCompass.org/Lent.

This Lenten season, however you use this devotional, our hope and prayer is that you feel supported in your desire to practice your faith in a way that is deeply renewing.



Ash Wednesday

March 2, 2022

God Is Already Here

by Brian Cole

You were within me, Lord, but I was outside myself.

—St. Augustine

Several years ago, while I was serving on the clergy staff at All Souls Cathedral in Asheville, North Carolina, a member of the parish made an appointment to see me. From the sound of her voice on the phone, it sounded like a rather urgent matter.

“I want to be more spiritual,” she said, even before we had sat down. Perfect, I thought. I know how to handle this. So, I gave her a book that I assured her would make her more spiritual. She thanked me and, after a brief prayer, departed to read the book.

Two months later, she called again. She needed to make another appointment. Once the second visit began, she thanked me for the book, but said again, “I want to be more spiritual.”

Hearing this, I was momentarily at a loss. The book I had loaned her was just right for making someone more spiritual. If I recall correctly, the word spiritual was even in the book title.

So, I gave her two more books. More books are better, right?

Before she had a chance to call and make another appointment, I took a call to a parish church in Kentucky. I never got the books back.

I do wonder what happened to the woman and if the additional books helped her with becoming more spiritual. Now, however, I believe my attempts to help were unhelpful.

I treated her desire to be more spiritual as if it was a problem to be solved. My solution was to give her something, some item outside of herself to fix the problem.



Thursday, March 3, 2022

Letting Go of the Outcome

by Scott Stoner

*When we let go of the outcome, we often feel
freer to show up as our authentic selves.*

In my work as a family therapist, I often share the thought, “Let go of the outcome,” as a directive that can help any of us re-center when we are anxious. Detaching from the outcome does not mean that we are not invested in or care about the outcome. It means that we are not going to try and force an outcome that may or may not be meant to be. It means we will fully invest, fully show up, knowing that we often have little control over what will ultimately happen. The paradox is that when we are able to let go of the outcome, we often feel freer to show up as our authentic selves.

For example, when I pray or meditate, if I have a preconceived idea that I “should” feel calm, centered, and closer to God in the experience, I may feel like I have failed when that doesn’t happen. If instead I let the experience be what it needs to be over time, I will find that my prayer life gradually deepens and matures.

Lent may bring expectations of what we “should” do or feel. If we have these thoughts, I invite us to let them go and let this particular experience of Lent be what it needs to be for each of us. Let’s simply focus on showing up, reading the daily reflections, engaging with the “Making It Personal” prompts, and letting go of any preconceived ideas of how this journey will go

Making It Personal: Think of a time when you tried to force an outcome, and another of when you were able to let go of an outcome. What was the difference for you? Are you aware of any expectations or outcomes you need to let go of as you begin this Lenten journey?

Friday, March 4, 2022

Letting Go of the Noise

by Scott Stoner

Be still and know that I am God.

—Psalm 46:10

When I talk with people about spirituality and wellness, I often find that I am simply reminding them, as well as myself, of what we already know but may have momentarily forgotten. This was the reaction I had when I read Brian Cole’s Ash Wednesday reflection. He reminded us of something we know but sometimes forget: God is found within us, not somewhere “out there.”

I often hear the voice of God as a whisper. It is usually a murmur, a sense of intuition, a small voice seeking to get my attention. One reason I may not sense God’s presence or voice within me is that my inner noise is often so loud that it drowns out the whisper. When this happens, I use a paraphrased version of Psalm 46:10 to remind myself that I need to make it a regular practice to “be still, so that I can hear the whispers of God in my life.”

The season of Lent is the perfect time to let go of things that interfere with connecting with God. For some this may involve giving something up for Lent. For others it may include taking on a practice or discipline that deepens their focus on their relationship with God. If adding a spiritual practice during Lent appeals to you, you might want to consider one of the four prayer practices offered on pp. 78-80.

Making It Personal: Are you giving something up for Lent this year? Are you considering taking on a spiritual practice or discipline? Do your answers to either of these questions relate to our theme of letting go?



Saturday, March 5, 2022

Finding God in Our Lives in the Present Moment

by Scott Stoner

God comes to us disguised as our life.

—Paula D’Arcy

I often hear people say that they are looking forward to the day that they finally will be able to relax and be happy. The circumstances vary, but the thinking is the same: “When _____ (fill in the blank) happens then I finally will be happy and be at peace.” The “something” they are waiting for may include a new job, a new relationship, or a change they want someone else to make. I can certainly relate to this thinking myself.

The problem with this thinking is twofold. First, once a particular concern changes, a new one often takes its place, and so the imagined stress-free future never arrives. The second reason this thinking is not productive is that it makes our inner state of well-being highly dependent on what is happening around us. While not minimizing the times when this is true, it often is the case that life is messy, and so our work is to find peace in the midst of the realities of that messiness.

I have always loved the quote above from Paula D’Arcy. It grounds me in the truth that no matter how stressed or messy my life currently is, God *is* in the midst of that mess. I don’t need to wait for some preferred future to reconnect with God. As Brian Cole reminded us in his Ash Wednesday reflection, God is already here no matter what is happening in or around us.

Making It Personal: What is your response to the Paula D’Arcy quote? Do you ever think that you can’t be at peace until your life, or something or someone in your life, changes? Can you think of a time when you felt God’s peace and presence in the midst of a stressful time for you? How were you different in each situation?

The First Sunday in Lent

March 6, 2022

Gifts That Set Us Free

by Liz Ward

*When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble.*

—Psalm 91:15

My husband's long struggles with Parkinson's and dementia taught me much about letting go. His decline in body and mind was barely noticeable at first, but slowly and more dramatically increased with time. Early in his diminishment, letting go was hard. It was hard to let go of expectations concerning daily routines and shared responsibilities, especially before he was formally diagnosed. It was hard to release my hopes and dreams for a retirement together after 45 years of sharing work and family life. I was not open to hearing the invitations and receiving the gifts of letting go.

As his disease progressed, it became abundantly clear that my life would never be the same. Paradoxically this awareness made letting go a little easier. Somehow, accepting a hard and undeniable truth eased my struggles and enabled me to open more fully to the gifts of letting go. The invitation to see the truth did, in fact, "set me free" to some extent.

As the years of painful decline continued, I was told it would be best to put him in hospice. It was hard to face life without him in it at all, to imagine what life could be without his cherished presence. This painful decision invited a fuller letting go than I was able to accept at the time. I still hoped there would be medical ways to improve the quality of his life and extend our time together. Gradually the hard truth of his situation became undeniable, and I found myself, with the loving help of hospice, more open to letting go yet again.

This releasing was graciously eased again during the final stage of his suffering. He was barely conscious and needed considerable medication to control his physical pain. Release from suffering seemed the most



Monday, March 7, 2022

Letting Go of Control

by Scott Stoner

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; ...

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Each Monday we will introduce a theme for the week related to our overall theme of letting go. This week we will focus on letting go of control.

In yesterday's reflection, Liz Ward poignantly wrote about coming to terms with her husband's Parkinson's and dementia, and subsequent death. She wrote about her own emotional and spiritual journey as she learned to let go of control and ultimately to discover "a deep inner peace that came from beyond me, that sprang from the Everlasting Source of Truth and Love." She could only find that peace as she learned to let go of what she could not control.

The Serenity Prayer (often used by AA) has much wisdom to teach us about letting go of control. Many people know the first four lines of the prayer, but I encourage you to pray the full prayer each day this week. Notice how it can guide us as we let go of our need to control the things we ultimately cannot control.

Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change; courage to change the things I
can; and wisdom to know the difference.*

*Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as
He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it;
trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to
His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and
supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.*

Making It Personal: Is there a line or phrase in the Serenity Prayer that most speaks to you? Is there a situation, something or someone in your life right now that you need to let go of the attempt to control?

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Control and Courage

by Scott Stoner

*God grant me ... courage to change the things I
can; and wisdom to know the difference.*

—Reinhold Niebuhr

A need to control often comes from an underlying sense of fear and insecurity. There are numerous stories in the Gospels about the political and religious leaders of Jesus' time who wanted to control him. The desire to contain and control Jesus was rooted in their fear and insecurity. They were afraid the truth that Jesus spoke would unmask and undermine their sense of power, false and hollow as it was.

We too may find that we will attempt to control a person or a situation because we are anxious. If any of us partake in controlling behavior toward anyone, be they a family member or friend, we would be wise to examine our motives. Is this desire grounded in some underlying sense of fear or insecurity? How would acknowledging that fear help both us and the others involved? Trying to control someone over whom we have no right or power to control will not only frustrate them, but will be frustrating to us, as well. Sometimes our attempts to control things, such as someone else's behavior, can have the opposite effect and actually cause the behavior or problem to increase.

The primary wisdom of the portion of the Serenity Prayer quoted above is the reminder for us to have the courage to focus on changing only the things that are truly ours to influence.

Making It Personal: Do you see any way you are trying too hard to push for your own way and/or trying to control someone else's life? If so, what might you change in yourself regarding that? How can the words of the Serenity Prayer guide you as you learn to let go of that attempt to control?



Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Not My Monkey; Not My Circus

by Robbin Brent

*Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; ...*

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Several years ago, I was talking with a dear friend and mentor about a chronic issue that was a huge thorn in my emotional side. I had tried everything to help the situation find more solid ground. I first offered suggestions, advice, and support that, over time, devolved into subtle threats, ultimatums, and emotional distancing. My friend listened patiently until I finished. He then skillfully offered support by sharing a story of his own that held several important similarities to mine. The conclusion to his story has continued to offer guidance for my fearful/controlling self for years. “You know, Robbin, I was an emotional wreck over my crazy situation. That is, until I stood back and took a longer view. And when I realized that what was going on was “not my monkey; not my circus,” I found great peace of mind and could let the situation be what it was going to be. Ironically, that’s when a true breakthrough happened and everything seemed to reconcile itself. So, just be patient and enjoy each and every day that you get to show up in your relationship. You’ve got this!”

His words of wisdom have continued to be a balm for the part of me that feels a need to control outcomes in order to protect myself from being hurt. I have come to realize that letting go of the outcome and letting situations be what they are going to be allows me to stay in the present moment, be more patient with myself and others when things are tough, and to enjoy each day as it comes.

Making It Personal: Can you think of a time when you felt a need to control a relationship or a situation? How did that make you feel? Can the quote above from the Serenity Prayer offer any consolation or guidance?

Thursday, March 10, 2022

Holding on and Letting Go

by Scott Stoner

*Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it
is, not as I would have it; ...*

—Reinhold Niebuhr

I recall a story told about a psychologist who was leading a seminar on stress resilience. She held up a glass partially full of water in front of the group and explained, “I am betting that many of you are thinking that I am going to ask you whether you think this glass is half full or half empty. Then I bet you think I will say that thinking the glass is half empty can cause you to feel increased stress. While that may be true, that is not my point. My point is that the longer I stand here holding this glass in mid-air, the more I feel stressed. The ability to see the situation clearly (in this case, the partially full glass of water) as it is, and to know when it is time to set it down and let go of it is the real key to stress resilience.”

This story is speaking the same truth as the lines of the Serenity Prayer quoted above. Having the wisdom to see any situation for what it is, rather than how we want it to be, is the key to peace of mind and to strengthening the ability to handle stress effectively. Who among us has not attempted to control the hurt in our lives by holding on to a resentment or a relationship? Or by holding on to a worry or concern?

Making It Personal: As you reflect on the stresses in your life, is it time to let go of something that you have been holding on to? What might that be, and what would it mean to put it down? Will you need help from others to help you be less controlling and to be able to respond differently? If yes, who might that be?



Friday, March 11, 2022

Obedient to Love

by Robbin Brent

*Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will; ...*

—Reinhold Niebuhr

This passage from the Serenity Prayer brings to mind *obedience*, a word that can make us uncomfortable. My initial understanding of obedience chafed against my desire to be in control. That is, until I discovered that the Latin origin of the word *obey* is *to listen to*. I have long admired the writing of Benedictine nun Joan Chittister, so I visited her website (monasteriesoftheheart.org) to learn more about obedience.

The Benedictine practice of Obedience is listening to what God is saying in all aspects of our life and responding to what is heard. We allow the choices and decisions of our life to become both a means to encounter God in the present moment, and a way to let go of the hidden motivations that limit our spiritual journey.

This description of the practice of obedience can offer new possibilities for embracing the Serenity Prayer's wisdom for our lives and spiritual journeys. If God is love, then being obedient to God's will is to be obedient to Love's call and response in every area of life. It is to trust that "all shall be well," no matter what the external conditions of our lives look like.

If the will of God is love for the world, then our trust and fidelity allows us to more deeply understand that the act of surrender is an act of love.

Making It Personal: What is your response to the quote from the Serenity Prayer? Can you think of a time when it was hard to listen to God's desires for your life? Can you think of a time when it was easy to hear God's voice? What could help you as you listen and respond to God's call to love and serve?

Saturday, March 12, 2022

Hide and Seek

by Jan Kwiakowski

*God grant ... that I may be reasonably happy in this life and
supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.*

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Last year, “Hide and Seek” was my three-year-old grandson’s favorite game. We’d take turns hiding (sometimes in plain sight), then earnestly and loudly seeking, laughing together with glee when the hider was found. If you’ve played this game with a little one, you know the experience of looking everywhere for someone hiding in plain sight, followed by laughter in the immediate joy of discovery.

Hide and Seek invites children to experiment with the tension between control in hiding and the vulnerability, relief, and happiness that can come with allowing themselves to be found. This human struggle around control and the vulnerability of letting go shows up throughout our lives. One way it shows up is in our focus on our human efforts to be “good enough” for God’s love, now, and in eternity.

Jesus is the master of playing hide and seek, of letting go, of finding and meeting people just as they are. Jesus loves us NOW, just as we are. Jesus loves us just as we are. Our fears and insecurities and being preoccupied with being good enough or with what we’ve done wrong, often causes us to want to hide from Jesus.

This Lent, how might we be called to stop hiding, let go of control, and allow ourselves be found by God’s holy, healing, and joyful love, so that we “may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next”?

Making It Personal: After this first week of Lent, what does letting go mean to you? What’s it like to know that Jesus earnestly wants to let you know how much you are loved by God? Describe a moment when you experienced God’s love.

The Second Sunday in Lent

March 13, 2022

I Must Be On My Way

by Bill Miller

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.

—Thomas Merton

Two years ago I received an unexpected invitation to apply for a very prestigious position in a dynamic American city. My wife and I were not yet engaged but believed that our futures were intertwined—with each other and with God’s call. We knew this opportunity would be challenging, grueling work, and not at all in our plans. We were also keenly aware of the adage, “We plan, God laughs.” We sensed that if God was calling us, we should be open to change. The interview process was exhausting but we poured ourselves into it, spiritually and soulfully, for months. We kept late nights dreaming the possibilities, praying that this “opportunity of a lifetime,” were it right for us, would come to pass. Finally, the verdict arrived. I had been chosen! Elated, we hugged our dogs, kissed each other, and toasted the exciting development. Then, at the last possible moment, the “powers that be” booted me from consideration. We were devastated by a spiritual and physical sucker-punch. It took us months to let go of this vision in which we had invested so much of ourselves.

Not long after the crushing blow, while out walking our dogs (a favorite spiritual practice), we suddenly exclaimed together, “Maybe we should move to Round Top, Texas!” We had never imagined living there, but we loved this tiny, charming town set among the rolling hills of Central Texas—especially its lively music, design, art, and culinary scene. Joseph Campbell once said about such liminal moments in our lives, *We must let go of the life we have planned, so to accept the one that is waiting for us.* Campbell also said that when one follows one’s bliss (or call), doors begin to open where there had been only walls. For Sandy and me, the doors began to fling open wide. A dream property with trees, a pond, birds, wildlife, and an old German farmhouse became available immediately



Monday, March 14, 2022

Letting Go of Hurt and Disappointment

by Scott Stoner

Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. ... Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self.”

—Matthew 16:24-26 (The Message)

This week’s theme focuses on letting go of hurt and disappointment. Each of us inevitably experiences hurt and disappointment in our lives. Bill Miller wrote in yesterday’s reflection about how hurt and disappointed he and his wife were when a seemingly ideal ministry call suddenly was denied by factors outside of their control. They could have chosen to stay mired in resentment but instead they chose to acknowledge their wound and then reopen their hearts and souls to what God might have in store for them. What is not inevitable, but rather a choice, is whether we will decide to hold on to our injuries or to let them go.

The scripture passage above reminds us that we need to re-choose each day to let God lead, to let Jesus be in the driver’s seat, as the saying goes. To do this, we often need to find a way to name and release our hurt and disappointment at things not turning out the way we wanted them to.

We invite you to join us this week as we examine how we can let go of both old and recent hurts that may be blocking us from fully living the life that God desires for us.

Making It Personal: Can you think of a time in your life when you struggled to let go of a hurt or disappointment you experienced? If you have been able to let that go, what helped you to do that? Are you aware of any hurt or disappointment in your life that you might want to work on letting go of this week?

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Letting Go of Our Plans

by Scott Stoner

If we are willing to let go of the life we had planned, we will be empowered to embrace the life to which we are called, traveling distances we never dreamed possible.

—Bill Miller

We all know the feeling of disappointment when something important we planned fails to happen. With the pandemic, we have had plenty of practice in dealing with disappointment over the many cancelled and disrupted plans: weddings, graduations, concerts, family visits, travel, work, and the list goes on and on. The larger truth is that both before and after the pandemic, life has provided and will continue to provide many opportunities to practice letting go of plans and facing the disappointment that comes when our plans fall apart.

In the Gospel passage read at most churches this past Sunday, Jesus is dealing with his disappointment in the people of Jerusalem. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34).

Life is full of hurt and disappointment. That’s the bad news. The good news is that new life and new beginnings are always possible once we fully acknowledge and feel our hurt and then, gradually, let it go and move beyond it. That is the promise of our faith. It is the ongoing process of death and resurrection that we live our entire lives. When we can let go of hurt and disappointment, new life will often emerge in ways we could not have previously imagined.

Making it Personal: How does your spirituality help you let go of hurt and disappointment? Can you think of a time when you let go of a plan and something completely different and new was able to emerge for you?



Wednesday, March 16, 2022

Going with the Flow

by Robbin Brent

To stand at the edge of the sea, to sense the ebb and flow of the tides, is to have knowledge of things that are as nearly eternal as any earthly life can be.

—Rachel Carson

Having grown up and spent most of my life in the mountains, the seaside has been an acquired love, but is now rooted in the heart of who I am and what inspires my spiritual journey. It is where I go to reconnect with the essential rhythms of my life and with God's desires for me. It has also become a refuge and place of healing from life's pain and disappointments.

When I am listening to the ocean's movements, sometimes gentle, sometimes violent, I am grounded and reassured by the eternal rhythm of the waves washing up on the sand, retreating, and returning. Being received, being released. This reminds me of a prayer practice Scott Stoner has used with groups he has facilitated over the years: the *Receive and Release* practice (more instruction on pp. 78-79). Here's a shortened version: As you inhale, repeat the word "receive," imagining yourself receiving what God has to offer you and wants to give to you right now. As you exhale, repeat the word "release," imagining yourself releasing to God what it is you need to let go of at this time. If you bring a situation for which you are seeking guidance to this practice, different words may come in to replace receive and release, such as "patience" as you inhale and "control" as you exhale, or "let go" as you inhale and "hurt and disappointment" as you exhale.

As we create space to become aware of God's presence, it becomes easier to let go of pain and disappointment and let God's healing love and blessing flow through us into the world.

Making It Personal: Is there a place you go to heal and to reconnect with your desires and God's desires for you? If you want to try this practice, do any particular words come to you? How might this practice support your desire to let go of what no longer serves?

Thursday, March 17, 2022

Letting Go of Resentment

by Scott Stoner

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

—Colossians 3:13

Robert Enright, one of the leading researchers on forgiveness, is the founder of the International Forgiveness Institute. He is also the author of *Forgiveness Is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*. On the website of the Institute, he offers the following definition of forgiveness:

When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realize that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts.

In this definition, we see that forgiveness is a choice. When a person chooses to let go of their right to be resentful, they can begin the process of forgiveness. This is a choice because it involves making a conscious decision to release the “right to the resentment.”

Enright goes on to say that to offer compassion and love to someone who has offended us is to offer that person a gift. And, as with any gift, forgiveness is always a choice; it is always a gift we can choose to give or to withhold.

Making It Personal: Reread Robert Enright’s definition of forgiveness. What stands out for you as you read this? Does his definition connect with your own experience? When have you been able to let go of your “right to resentment”?



Friday, March 18, 2022

The Gift of Forgiving Ourselves

by Robbin Brent

*By letting go of past hurts, we can heal not only ourselves,
but our families, our communities, and our world.*

—Desmond Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*

There is a strong connection between our ability to forgive others and our ability to forgive ourselves. How can we offer to others what we don't have ourselves? There is also strong evidence that forgiving ourselves—letting go of past pain, regret, and resentment—promotes well-being: body, mind, and spirit. In his book on forgiveness quoted above, Tutu shares careful research revealing that people who choose to forgive report fewer physical and mental problems, and show fewer physical symptoms of stress. It is good for us, good for others, and good for the world.

If forgiving ourselves sets us free from past mistakes and helps us to heal and grow, why is it often so hard to do? Sometimes the hardest disappointment to let go of is disappointment in ourselves. “Why didn't I ... If only ... I should have thought of that. ...” As we think about forgiving ourselves, it might be helpful to reflect on questions like these: In what ways am I blocking love? How am I my own best friend (kind, compassionate, and accepting) and my own worst enemy (self-blaming, judging, impatient, unforgiving)? How am I getting in my own way?

We've included four spiritual practices in this devotional to support our journey through Lent, and beyond. One of them, the Welcoming Prayer, can be a powerful practice in helping us to choose to forgive ourselves. If you decide to engage with this practice, for Step 2 you could choose to notice what you are struggling to forgive yourself for, and to welcome it. “Welcome judgement,” “Welcome disappointment,” “Welcome regret,” etc. You can learn more on p. 80.

Making It Personal: In general, are you able to let go and forgive yourself for past mistakes or regrets? If self-forgiveness is something you struggle with, what is one step you could take to help you be more compassionate with yourself? Do you have a trusted friend or family member who could support you in your commitment to forgive yourself?

Saturday, March 19, 2022

What's in Your Backpack?

by Jan Kwiatkowski

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.

—1 John 4:18 (NIV)

As the mom of four sons, I was the mom who carried a backpack with enough supplies to cover any contingency or emergency. When we'd get home, I'd take out anything perishable and tell myself I'd fully clean the backpack "later."

After a month of "laters," the backpack got darn heavy, and I'd be forced to make time to go through it. As I sorted through the contents, I began to notice that much of what I was carrying I carried out of fear of not having something I'd need to care for those whom I loved. As I gained confidence in my parenting, I learned to carry a few essentials and to trust that if needed, there would be others I could turn to for help. This allowed me to relax and be present to those I loved (and this decision sure made for a lighter backpack).

This week we focused on letting go of hurt and disappointment, the stuff we carry in our emotional and spiritual backpacks. To survive during this anxious time of pandemic and continual crises around us, we've had to tuck hurts, disappointments, big questions, difficult emotions, fear, and pain into our internal backpacks. Over time, the contents of our internal backpacks can spill out in anger, impatience, attempts to control, isolation, grief, and so much more.

Lent invites us to take time to examine what we currently carry in our emotional and spiritual backpacks. Lent invites us to be confident in God's perfect love and fearlessly let go of those things that weigh us down so that we may be present to those God calls us to love.

Making It Personal: What's in your emotional and spiritual backpack? Is there something specific you need or want to let go of? What do you need from Jesus to help you let go?

The Third Sunday in Lent

March 20, 2022

Know What to Throw Away and What to Keep

by Edward Thompson

*You've got to know when to hold 'em
Know when to fold 'em.*

—Kenny Rogers

My father was a school teacher, the township commissioner, and a farmer in southeastern Liberia. Farming took up at least half of his time, and the remaining half of his time was split between teaching and local community affairs. I'd say much of his success as a farmer was due to his ability to discern when to stick it out and when to let go. Dad could see the long-term potential in a venture and knew when he needed to stick with it. One year, Firestone Rubber Company, an Ohio-based rubber processing giant and the only one buying from local farmers, decided to make an offer to rubber farmers in Liberia: "Sell us your farm and work for us or we will have to pull out. The price of rubber on the world market is hurting our business model." Despite the allure of the money and the threat of losing a buying source for rubber, father rejected the offer outright! He felt that the rubber tree had an exceptionally long lifespan. And more important, he knew that his children would one day inherit this land.

Even so, when a rubber tree got badly bruised by one of my older brothers while tapping it, "Papé" knew to leave it to self-destruct rather than waste precious time and energy on only one of several thousand trees. When the weekly four-hour long journey from town to farming plantation by foot and over water in a dugout began to take a toll on his body, he knew to withdraw from that commute before it became unbearable and caused damage to his body, mind, and soul. He made the wise decision to retire and continue farming cash crops on the outskirts of town.

These memories of my father come to mind when I read the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree, the Gospel reading for today from Luke 13:1-9. Jesus



Monday, March 21, 2022

Letting Go to Enhance Our Health and Well-Being

by Scott Stoner

Of what do we need to let go? What might we need to let go of today in order to protect and nurture the health of our heart, soul, mind, and body?

—Edward Thompson

In yesterday's reflection, Edward Thompson concludes with two profound questions: "Of what do we need to let go? What might we need to let go of today in order to protect and nurture the health of our heart, soul, mind, and body?" His questions raise, and more fully bring to our awareness, the connection between letting go and our overall sense of health and well-being.

Our Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative focuses on a whole-person approach to wellness. The four quadrants of the Living Compass are heart, soul, strength, and mind, which can be found in both Old and New Testament scriptures. These ancient texts call us to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. The Living Compass addresses two dimensions of well-being within each of the four quadrants, with a total of eight areas. This week, as we focus on our theme of how letting go enhances our health and well-being, we will use the four quadrants and eight dimensions of well-being on the Compass as a guide for our reflections.

Knowing when to hold on to and when to let go of ideas, plans, relationships, ways of dealing with stress, and many other things in our lives is essential to our overall sense of well-being. Letting go too soon may lead to regret or may lead to us miss an opportunity for growth. On the other hand, holding on too long can cause unnecessary suffering.

Making It Personal: What do you notice at this moment when you pause and reflect on your overall state of health and well-being? Do you see any immediate connections between what you notice and a need or desire to let something go? Can you think of a time when letting go improved your health and well-being?

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

Letting Go With All Your Heart

by Scott Stoner

Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God.

—Philippians 2:14-15 (The Message)

The *Heart* quadrant of the Living Compass focuses on *Handling Emotions* and *Healthy Relationships*. One practice that will benefit both areas is reducing our tendency to complain, something that seems quite common these days.

Research shows that complaining raises cortisol, a hormone that regulates a wide range of processes throughout the body that can have a negative effect on our health. In addition, numerous studies have shown that optimists live longer than pessimists, indicating that a positive outlook on life enhances our overall well-being. And we all have painful experience with the truth that when we chronically complain to or about someone, we often cause damage to our relationships.

With this in mind, here's a challenge I invite us all to try as one way to enhance both our emotional and relational well-being. For the next twenty-four hours, try to completely let go of complaining by committing to not utter *one single complaint* for one day. I have tried this numerous times and it is always humbling to see how quickly a tendency to complain arises.

When we commit to being more mindful about what we say, we find that it enhances not only our emotional well-being, but also the well-being of our relationships. And the less we complain, the more we will, in the words of the scripture quoted above, “provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God.”

Making It Personal: How does the passage from Philippians speak personally to you? Are you aware of a relationship in your life that might be suffering because of your complaining? Are you willing to try letting go of complaining for the next twenty-four hours?



Wednesday, March 23, 2022

Letting Go With All Your Soul

by Robbin Brent

Say Yes. Say Yes, and. ... Make your partner look good. Be curious, not critical. There are no mistakes, only opportunities. Relax and have fun.

—Improv Rules

Spirituality and Rest & Play are the two areas of well-being found in the Soul quadrant. Let's focus on Play as it is an area perhaps most often ignored or overlooked. I was first introduced to Improv, a form of play, during a Living Compass training in Chicago. On Friday night after dinner, Scott Stoner introduced a gifted troupe of improv artists that he knew, and the evening promised to be entertaining and enjoyable. That is ... until it became clear that WE were going to participate too.

After performing several brilliant scenes, the troupe invited us to play with them. It was really scary for many of us because it was hard to let go of our self-consciousness. We were afraid of looking ridiculous and rigid, of not knowing how to play. Scott put us more at ease when he shared some of the Improv rules above. Because everyone was kind and supportive, I found enough courage to let go of (some of) my worry over what others would think. And in that moment, I experienced a greater freedom and ease in my own skin, and found harmony and hilarity in the group.

We all discovered that play truly can be transformative because it builds and strengthens rapport, trust, connection, and community. Play provides a spacious space in which to let go of what is limiting and stressful and to open more fully to all that life has to offer in this moment, the only one we have.

Making It Personal: Do you regularly take time to rest and play? If not, do you think play might help to enhance your overall health and well-being? One suggestion to get started is to apply some of the rules of Improv to your daily life and relationships.

Thursday, March 24, 2022

Letting Go With All Your Strength

by Scott Stoner

*Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it.
Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay
anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company
with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*

—Matthew 11:29-30 (The Message)

The *Strength* Quadrant of the Living Compass focuses on *Care for the Body* and *Stress Resilience*. How we carry and manage stress and our ability to let it go when it is time is key to our physical well-being.

Here's a little exercise to remind us how it feels to hold on to stress. Take both your hands and make a fist. Clench them as hard as you can and hold them for fifteen seconds. Now, gradually open your hands and release your clenched fists. What difference do you notice in your body and the overall way you feel between these two states?

The scripture above from Matthew reminds us that our spirituality can give us the ability to live with the “unforced rhythms of grace” and to “learn to live freely and lightly.”

Opening our hands not only releases tension but also opens us to be more receptive of God's grace. One cannot be open to others, or to God, with a clenched fist.

Making It Personal: What speaks to you in the scripture above from Matthew? What did you notice in the exercise of clenching and unclenching your hands? Do you have a prayer or spiritual practice that helps ground you in the “unforced rhythms of grace”?



Friday, March 25, 2022

Letting Go With All Your Mind

by Robbin Brent

*The best way to find out what we really
need is to get rid of what we don't.*

—Marie Kondo

Today we'll touch upon the *Mind* quadrant of the Living Compass, which focuses on two areas of well-being: *Vocation* and *Organization*.

One of the resources we offer at Living Compass is training for people who are interested in facilitating Wellness Circles in their communities. Part of the training involves experiencing a six-week wellness circle. During the first session, each participant chooses one of eight areas of well-being on which to focus. With eight areas to choose from, it was surprising that in three of my last wellness circles, half chose Organization. While each person chose this area for their own reasons, they all expressed some version of the same desire. In order to be able to pay attention to what and where God was inviting them, they first needed to make space in their lives.

During the last session, several of us were moved to tears by the stories of authentic change, growth, and transformation. Many described a sense of more space mentally, emotionally, and physically. While the journey and the process were challenging at times, all felt that by letting go of what no longer served a purpose in their lives (physical belongings, relationships, jobs, even retirement for one, and negative emotional habits), they were more available to receive the gifts and blessings God was offering them.

Making It Personal: Is there an area in your life that could benefit from being less cluttered: mentally, physically, or emotionally? If so, what is one thing you could commit to doing that would help you let go of something that no longer blesses your life? Is there someone you could ask for support?

Saturday, March 26, 2022

Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind

by Jan Kwiatkowski

Live out your God-created identity.

—Matthew 5:48 (The Message)

As the chaplain at a continuous-care retirement community, I observed that the choices people made in their 50s and 60s, or chose not to make, had long-term effects on both the day-to-day quality of their lives and eventually their deaths.

This week we looked at letting go through the four quadrants of the Living Compass: heart, soul, strength, and mind. The people I served felt the urgency of choice around what to hold on to and what to let go of related to healing important relationships, what to do with possessions, finances, prioritizing time and energy, spirituality and meaning-making, and finding ways to say important things to people they loved. For those I served, as well as for myself, living well in heart, soul, strength, and mind determined and defined “quality of life.”

Every year Lent invites us to pay attention to and make choices about letting go. Lent reminds us that NOW is the time to make wise choices to heal, change, refocus, prioritize, and to love more deeply. We are urged to grow into our God-created identity. The kingdom needs our God-inspired choices.

Making It Personal: Is the Spirit nudging you to nurture a particular area of the quadrant? As a person of faith, how do you define “quality of life” or growing into your God-created identity? What has touched your heart, mind, soul, or strength most between Ash Wednesday and today?

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 27, 2022

Rooted in Love

by Sarah Flick

“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

—Luke 15:31-32

How do we experience invitations to let go of our possessions, our money, our expectations, our judgments, our relationships? In our common humanity, we struggle with releasing what we hold, in body, mind, or spirit. This can be especially true in families. Just as Jesus tells many stories about letting go, life often provides us with many opportunities to let go. How can we both honor and embrace our private struggles while we release what is no longer needed in order to make room for what will serve others, what we can share?

In today’s Gospel reading from Luke, in the parable of the Prodigal and his brother, Jesus teaches us about letting go and love. Love teaches us about letting go, even when we might really want to hold on to what we have, including entitlements, resentments, and perceived losses and injustices.

The younger son asked for his inheritance and then quickly lost it all. He had to let go of his pride and autonomy and any expectations about how he would be received when he decided to return home. And in letting go of any control over his welcome, he was received with mercy, hope, and love. His father, overjoyed, spared nothing to celebrate his son’s return.

The older son, furious that his father was lavishing wealth and love on his unworthy younger brother, was severely challenged by his father to let go of his sense of injustice at the inexcusable behavior of his brother. Behavior that he felt called for restitution rather than reconciliation. Certainly not love.



Monday, March 28, 2022

Letting Go In Love

by Scott Stoner

Love teaches us about letting go, even when we might really want to hold on to what we have.

—Sarah Flick

For our theme this week, we will focus on letting go in love. The quote above from yesterday's reflection by Sarah Flick tells that love has much to teach us about letting go. So I invite us all to be students this week of what love, and what the love of God, has to teach us about letting go.

One of the passages read in many churches yesterday was the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). This story is so well-known because it speaks to the challenges of both loving and letting go within families and with others we love. We see letting go happening here with all three main characters. We see it as we read of the father being able to let his son go, even though he no doubt was not in favor of his son's choice to go. The younger son had to let go of his pride in order to return to his family home, and the older brother struggles with letting go of his self-righteousness and resentment.

Similarly, as we explore the theme of letting go in love, we will find that within the stories and situations of our own lives, we are frequently provided with numerous opportunities to practice this skill.

Making It Personal: Which person in the Prodigal Son parable do you think had the biggest challenge in letting go? Have you experienced the gift of someone showing love to you by letting you go in some way? Have you offered that gift to someone you love?

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

Love Is a Decision

by Scott Stoner

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

—1 Corinthians 13:4-7

It is common to think of love as a feeling one has for another. While feelings are certainly one aspect of love, I believe that love is, most importantly, a decision. Feelings ebb and flow in all relationships, yet the decision to act with patience, kindness, and hope is, while not easy, always possible.

These verses from 1 Corinthians 13 teach us that love also involves making decisions to let go in its invitation to let go of envy, boastfulness, arrogance, and rudeness, as well as letting go of taking delight in another's wrongdoing. It is natural to feel hurt when someone does us wrong, but it takes spiritual maturity to choose to let go of those feelings.

This passage also talks about our need to put away "childish ways." Clearly, 1 Corinthians 13 has much to teach us about letting go of our immature understandings of love. It can help guide us as we seek to grow into the full stature of the loving people God invites us to be.

Making It Personal: What connection do you see between love and letting go in the passage from 1 Corinthians? Is there a specific person in your life right now with whom you need to practice letting go of any of the barriers to love mentioned in this scripture?



Wednesday, March 30, 2022

Setting Love Free

by Robbin Brent

If you love something, set it free.

—Multiple Sources

When my sons were very young we adopted two kittens. They were so excited. My youngest son, Cory, named his kitten Betty and Brent named his Wild Thing (yes, this may say a lot about everyone’s personalities, but that’s another story). As we were settling into life with our four-footed family members, Cory came to me in tears. “Mom, Betty won’t come to me when I want to hold her.” He was afraid Betty had stopped loving him. I had been watching them together and noticed that Cory held Betty gently, but firmly, for long periods of time, and when she moved to get down, he’d hold on a little tighter. I responded, “She really loves you and loves to be held and petted. But when she wants to get down and you don’t let her, when she is finally able to be free, she’s a bit reluctant to come back. Why don’t you try letting her go as soon as you can tell she wants to get down?” He said he’d try.

With practice and a few more tears, he soon discovered that if he let her down right away, she came back much more readily. This memory reminded me of the quote above. It is often easy to let go of things we don’t like or don’t want, but it is much harder to hold lightly and be willing to let go of what we love. Yet, if we love something, being willing to set it free may be the greatest act of love we can offer.

Making It Personal: Is there something or someone to which you feel you are clinging too tightly? It could be an idea or perspective or habit. Is there one thing you feel is standing between you and a fuller expression of love that you feel ready to gently letting go of?

Thursday, March 31, 2022

Letting Go of Any Anger That Blocks Love

by Scott Stoner

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

—Ephesians 4:26

As I was playing with my eight- and five-year-old grandsons at the playground recently, I witnessed a remarkable scene. Another child (someone unrelated to us who just happened to be at the playground at the same time) slid down a high slide before my older grandson had cleared the bottom of the slide, slamming right into my grandson. It hurt him and he became upset. He turned to the other child, expressed his anger, and the other child apologized. Then, just moments later, they were laughing and playing together on the teeter-totter.

What was remarkable to me was watching my grandson do exactly what Paul counsels in the passage above: feel and express our anger, and then let it go. I realized that I had much to learn from these young children. Far too often, I hold on to my anger, turning over an injury or injustice in my mind until well after the sun sets.

Letting go of anger requires humility and vulnerability, yet by doing so, we make room for positive feelings to emerge. While anger is a natural feeling to experience, feeling angry is not actually the problem. Even Jesus felt and expressed anger. The problem begins when we choose not to let go of our anger after we've expressed it. As with the older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, choosing not to let go of our anger prevents healing and reconciliation, and our openness to love.

Making It Personal: What is your response to Paul's words about not letting the sun set on your anger? Do you find it hard to express and then to let go of anger? How does your spirituality help you deal with anger?



Friday, April 1, 2022

Paddling and Perfectionism

by Robbin Brent

Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day.

—Winnie the Pooh

Have you ever known those rare people, the ones who have the ability to make fun of themselves, to not take themselves too seriously? They don't seem to worry about getting everything, or anything for that matter, right. They enjoy the moment just as it is, and the people in it just as they are. They seem to be content with being perfectly imperfect.

As a perpetually reforming perfectionist, I have long admired those qualities and approach to living and loving. But looks can be deceiving. When someone reflects to me how calm and centered I am in a stressful situation, often what comes to mind is an image of a duck. They may be gliding gracefully across the surface of a pond or lake, but underneath the water their feet are paddling furiously. And, no matter how furiously we paddle, it never feels like it's enough if we are striving for an unattainable standard of perfection.

How can we be free to live and love imperfectly, trusting that we are "good enough" as we are? How can we trust that God blesses us and our desires, even when, especially when, to our critical eye they appear to come up short? How can letting go of perfectionism be an act of love, toward ourselves, and toward others? May we trust that there is no need to hurry or worry or fret or struggle, or to continue to paddle furiously. We will get there when we are meant to.

Making It Personal: Do you know someone who seems to move through life gracefully yet might be struggling quietly to attain an impossibly high standard of perfection? Do you relate to the thought that letting go of perfect is an act of love toward yourself and others? If you struggle to let go of the struggle, is there someone you can turn to for support and encouragement?

Saturday, April 2, 2022

Witness, Love, and Trust

by Jan Kwiatkowski

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

—2 Corinthians 5:7

When I was a hospice chaplain, I realized how often patients and families need to cling to a generally predictable path of disease progression. They looked to the knowledge, experience, and wisdom of the professional caregivers to guide them on this unfamiliar journey. Patients and families walked by faith with the hospice staff, trusting us to help them navigate the difficult path ahead.

As patients approached the final few weeks and hours of life, families would often ask how long we thought it would be. Of course, none of us could answer that question with any certainty. All we could do was to slow down the pace and join them in paying closer attention to the smallest signs that end of life was getting closer.

As death approached, we'd often see patients make gestures of reaching, as if they wanted to hold on to us. Most often, they were seeing and reaching for something beyond us, that we were witnessing something that was happening between them and God. The internal eyes of the dying invited us to let go of our doing, and witness and trust that God walks with each of us, and trust that God sees and knows a way that none of our eyes can see. We were invited to let go and let God love our loved ones.

This week we looked at loving and letting go. We don't know how God works in those we love. We can only witness and trust that God does. When it comes to letting go, we walk by faith and not by sight.

Making It Personal: Reflect on a time of letting go. As you reflect, how do you see God's presence during that time? Can you recall a time when you walked by faith and not by sight? If yes, how was God present for you during that time?

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

April 3, 2022

Letting Go and Letting in Extravagance

by Amy Cook

“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?”

—John 12:5

If I am truly honest with myself, I relate most to Judas in this passage. Not that I’m stealing money or don’t care for the poor, but in his question above—“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?”—I see myself. I see raising a point that the crowd could agree with me on, and critiquing someone else’s actions without any personal responsibility. I don’t blame Judas because I relate to this.

It is so easy to state the problem with a solution that doesn’t involve me! I have often found myself in conversations with like-minded friends where we solve the world’s problems. We laugh and say “if only we were in charge!” But we aren’t in charge, and instead fix problems with other people’s resources, time, and power, and without any personal cost. Perhaps Judas did have an ulterior motive and was hoping to skim funds off the top, or perhaps the gospel writer wanted to paint him in an especially harsh light to separate Judas far from the other disciples. Whatever the writer’s motivations, I see myself in Judas.

Judas’ response also critiques that which is unexpected and upsets societal norms. He probably was not the only one in the room confused and uncomfortable; and his objection would bring others in agreement with him, an unspoken choosing of sides. In this Gospel story Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with perfume and wipes them with her hair. This is intimate, personal, and is unsettling to witness an act of obvious love and devotion. Mary shares in a beautiful, uninhibited way, and that is why I understand Judas, standing to the side, trying to sound righteous. I get Judas and his actions, but I really want to be Mary—I want to be uninhibited in love, and I want to be able to let go.



Monday, April 4, 2022

Letting Go of *Shoulds*

by Scott Stoner

*Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval?
Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing
people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

—Galatians 1:10

In yesterday's reflection, Amy Cook shared a struggle that is common for many of us: worrying about what others think about how we should or should not be acting. The desire to please others can be an act of kindness. In excess, though, being a "people pleaser" and avoiding conflict just to make others happy is not good for us, and is not who we are called to be as people of faith.

This week we will be reflecting on letting go of *shoulds*. Amy shared something yesterday about herself that I think many of us can relate to. She wrote, "I can feel constrained by what others might think, by unspoken norms and disapproving looks. But there is a wonderful freedom in Mary's letting go of others' opinions."

The Gospel passage read in many churches yesterday is the story of Mary Magdalene anointing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume despite Judas' judgment. Judas tells Mary she should not be doing this as it is a waste of the precious oils, and yet Mary feels led by the Spirit to do so as a way of comforting Jesus, who she knows is weary.

Sometimes, of course, we need to listen to *shoulds*. Other times, we need to discern when letting go of them is just what God is calling us to do. This process of discernment is what we will be reflecting on this week.

Making It Personal: As you reflect on our theme for this week, are you aware of any *shoulds* that you may want to let go of? Do you ever feel you are too much of a "people pleaser," constrained by what others think about you? Can you think of a time when you let go of what others might think and instead followed the call of the Spirit?

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Living from the Inside Out

by Scott Stoner

The glory of God is the human being fully alive.

—St. Irenaeus of Lyons

When we are living from the “outside in,” it means we are overly focused on living up to the expectations of others. There are, of course, times we want to do exactly that. But if our default is always to do that, we will most likely end up depleted and possibly resentful.

Instead, living from the “inside out” requires a radical shift in our thinking, and is based on two essential skills. First, we need to take time to identify what we truly feel and need inside. We need to “go inside” regularly to know our deepest longings and determine for ourselves what truly makes us content. For people of faith, this includes going inside to listen to God’s voice. If we do this regularly, then we can proceed to the second step, which is to make intentional decisions about what in our lives we say “yes” and “no” to. This practice creates a greater sense of balance for ourselves, and more honest and meaningful connections with others.

Learning to live more from the “inside out” is one of the keys to maintaining our spiritual and emotional wellness. I know for myself that whenever my spiritual or emotional wellness is low—running on empty—it is because I have been living too much from the “outside in.”

Making It Personal: What do you think of this idea of living from the inside out vs the outside in? What might you need to let go of to live more from the inside out? Might there be a spiritual practice that could help you to live from the inside out?



Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Timshol: Yes We Can

by Robbin Brent

May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.

—Nelson Mandela

I recently came upon a word that came to mind as I reflected on the importance of letting go of *shoulds*. The Hebrew word *timshol* could be an antidote to *should*. In his book, *East of Eden*, John Steinbeck explores this word and the powerful implications from the translation of it that means *thou mayest*. The word appears in Genesis 4:7 in God's response to Cain for murdering his brother in Genesis. "And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you *must* (*may*) master it."

Out of three possible translations—You *must* master it; You *will* master it; You *may* master it—the last one offers both the spaciousness and the responsibility that comes with truly having a choice. In this translation, God was telling Cain that he had a choice whether to be good or evil. He was free to choose. As are we.

But it's not only about having freedom, it's about what we do with that freedom. Do we join our hopes with God's hopes and prayers for us and for the world? Or do we choose to continue to pummel ourselves with the *shoulds* that come with living a life smaller than the one God has planned for us? Do we continue to hold on to how we think we should be, or do we choose to let go in order to embrace the life God is inviting us to live?

It is up to us how we will use the gift of choice. May we choose to live our best lives, the lives God created us to live. May we harness the forces of freedom so that we experience God's kingdom on earth right here, right now.

Making It Personal: What is your response to the three possible translations of *timshol*? If there is a challenging relationship or situation that you are currently facing, can you think of a person or spiritual practice that might help you to choose more life-giving options?

Thursday, April 7, 2022

Letting Go of Shame-Based Faith

by Scott Stoner

*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear;
for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever
fears has not reached perfection in love.*

—1 John 4:18

I have no tolerance for religious faith that is shame-based or fear-based. This false form of faith attempts to scare people into “right belief” and “right action” by creating a fear of God and God’s supposed wrath and judgment toward humankind. This approach comes with a long list of what we should do and is never helpful in creating positive growth and change.

My understanding of authentic faith is based on love and grace. This kind of faith draws people in through a radical sense of love and creates a desire in people to want to believe and to want to live in a certain way. Imagine how much more meaningful our relationship with God can be when it is rooted in love rather than fear and shame. Feelings of guilt are appropriate when we have done something wrong, but I believe feelings of shame are never what God wants us to experience.

As a therapist, I have had the honor of helping many people recover from toxic faith backgrounds that have trapped them in feelings of shame, guilt, and inadequacy. It is a beautiful thing to witness a person discovering for the first time that God loves them just as they already are. It is not a love that has to be earned or a love that can ever be lost. When a person experiences this love, they only want to seek a deeper relationship with God, not out of fear, but from a place of love and abundance.

Making It Personal: Do you struggle with any fear-based or shame-based feelings about your relationship with God? If so, what helps you to overcome those feelings? Are you a part of a community of faith that celebrates a love-based understanding of God?



Friday, April 8, 2022

It's Never Too Late

by Robbin Brent

*Help me to believe in beginnings, to make a beginning,
to be a beginning, so that I may not just grow old,
but grow new each day of this wild, amazing life you
call me to live with the passion of Jesus Christ.*

—Ted Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace*

Living Compass frequently uses a saying to underscore the importance of where we place our attention and focus: “Whatever you pay attention to in your life is what will grow.” To help us cultivate and nurture life-enhancing habits, let’s focus on the powerful benefits of a daily practice of gratitude. Some of the many gifts that come from finding things for which to be grateful include enhancing and growing our circle of friends and close relationships, improving physical and psychological health, enhancing empathy and reducing aggression, improving sleep and self-esteem, and increasing mental strength.

We know that holding on to negative feelings, such as guilt, shame, disappointments, and embarrassments can drain us of our health and vitality. Choosing to let go of those feelings, and nurturing ourselves—in mind, body, and spirit—is a gift we can offer to God. It is a way to express our deep gratitude for all the gifts and blessings God has freely given to us.

No matter what unhealthy choices we’ve made, or regrets we have about the past, it is never too late to begin making healthier, happier choices. Today, this moment, is a new beginning. Let’s make it count.

Making It Personal: As we explore gratitude, what might we need to let go of in order to receive and share those gifts? For the remainder of Lent, I invite you to consider committing to a daily practice of gratitude. A simple way to begin is to list three things for which you are grateful. Each day, take a few moments to notice what you are seeing and experiencing, and what you are grateful for.

Saturday, April 9, 2022

Should I? Shall I?

by Jan Kwiatkowski

*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

—Matthew 22:37

Should is a powerful word. Its power can drive us toward our best selves, or paralyze us with guilt for those times when we are anything but our best selves. According to www.askanydifference.com, “*Shall*” is used to express ideas and laws. “*Should*” is used to express personal opinions and desires, and primarily to give advice.

Our reflections this week focused on letting go of the unhealthy *shoulds* in our lives. Notice that both the Old and New Testament quotes use the word *shall* not *should*. The law about loving God, our neighbor, and ourselves with every part of our being is *shall*. It’s not a should. It’s not God’s opinion about what to do. It’s God’s idea and law. The ten commandments also begin with the words “thou shalt.”

Shall implies a growing and living toward the ideal of the law. *Should* implies success or failure. God created us to always be growing, striving, repenting, and returning. God always invites us to grow and change. Unlike most of us, God doesn’t get stuck on *should*. God’s love is unimaginably beyond holding us to the human standard of success or failure.

I have to wonder what our individual and collective lives would look like if we lived into God’s *shall*, rather than humankind’s *should*.

Making It Personal: What are your first thoughts about the distinction between should and shall? Do you have any shoulds in your life right now that you might consider reframing as shalls? What difference do you think that might make in your relationships, with yourself and with others?

Palm Sunday

April 10, 2022

Emptying Yourself in Love

by Mary Bea Sullivan

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, ...

—Philippians 2:5-7

Encountering the Palm Sunday service is an experience of liturgical whiplash, embodying extreme letting go. Traditionally, this service begins outdoors—palm branches raised high for blessing, Jesus’ triumphal entry recounted, and then the procession moves inside as voices illustriously proclaim, “All Glory Laude and Honor to you redeemer King” Jarringly, moments later, those same voices cry “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Imagine the high-to-horror experience of the disciples as they lived that fateful week—their dream of king ripped from their grasp; their dreams for their beloved teacher and friend nailed to a cross. Later, those same disciples will unfurl their grip on their own dreams, and with hearts and palms open to receive Jesus’ dream for the world, they will pour out their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

Philippians 2 is a Christ hymn, imploring us to put on the mind of Christ. In essence, the crux of this hymn is a mantra that sustains us when life’s triumphs bring joy; and life’s tragedies bring sorrow. “Empty yourself in love,” Jesus beckons as he enters the dangers awaiting him in Jerusalem. “Empty yourself in love,” as he beckons all to the table.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, people have been knocked off-center by unceasing, unexpected, unwelcome change. Like the crushing turbulence of hurricane-whipped waves, plans, careers, and modes of operation have been ripped from our grasp. Unmet expectations have crashed down and piled up along the shores of our lives.



April 11, 2022

Letting Go of Expectations

by Jan Kwiatkowski

*It is in releasing our expectations that we receive
Christ's redeeming love that restores all that is lost.*

—Mary Bea Sullivan

I am reasonably sure that every person reading this has felt helpless at the bedside of a sick loved one, or stood helplessly by as a teenager engaged in risky behavior. Perhaps all you could do was to let go, stay close, and love as you watched someone suffer a break-up of a relationship, the loss of a job, a shattered hope or dream. This week we will have many opportunities to return to the theme this week, of letting go of expectations.

Staying present, letting go of unreasonable expectations, and offering love and kindness as people walk the story of their lives can be one of the most profound, heart-wrenching things we'll ever do. During challenging times, we all experience the limits, powerlessness, and vulnerability of being human. But hopefully, we are brought to the point where, for love's sake, we are able to trust enough to let go and to give the person or the situation over to God. It is helpful to remember these words from Luke: "Not my will but yours be done."

During Holy Week, we witness again the story of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. How might we experience this week if we didn't know the end? What would it be like to be one of the twelve, the bystander in the crowds, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, or any figure in the stories of this week? How were they able to let go of their fears and dashed expectations while staying close to Jesus as he suffered?

Making It Personal: What Holy Week figure do you most identify with right now? Reflect on why you are drawn to this figure. How do you think they were able to let go, out of love, of their expectations while remaining present with open hearts? Is there a person or situation you are feeling ready to let go of painful expectations this week?

April 12, 2022

Still Making All Things New

by Jan Kwiatkowski

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See,
I am doing a new thing! ... I am making a way in
the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

—Isaiah 43:18-19 (NIV)

We all experience times in life when we are asked to let go of a job, a loved one, a way of life, a relationship, expectations, or hopes and dreams. In the depths of grief, confusion, anxiety and fear, we may in despair or lament ask God, “Why?” When everything around us seems lost or out of our control, it’s hard to trust that God continues to use every part of our human lives make all things new. Holy Week reminds us that we are not the first people to live through times when God asks us to trust the transforming power of love to make all things new.

I imagine that Jesus’ followers experienced the brutal days we now call Holy Week as a profound dark wilderness and wasteland. I can imagine their hearts and minds felt shredded by confusion, anger, fear, desperation and grief, as their hopes and expectations were being led to death. I wonder if the passage from Isaiah entered the minds and hearts of Jesus’ followers. Or if any of the words of scripture brought sustenance during those days.

We are not all that different from the people who directly witnessed the passion and death of Jesus. God asks the same of us that God asked of them: Let go of the former things, the way we thought things would, could, or should be ... all you thought you knew, and see that I am indeed making all things new.

Making It Personal: What Scriptures sustain you in times of darkness or hopelessness? What’s it like to think of ourselves as similar to those who lived that week with Jesus? On this Tuesday in Holy Week of 2022, what is your sense of God’s doing a new thing?



April 13, 2022

The Forever Invitation

by Jan Kwiatkowski

Let go and let God.

—Step 3, Alcoholics Anonymous (paraphrase)

There are times when life reminds us just how much is out of our control and how much is held in the heart and hands of God. Times when our hopes, dreams, plans, or expectations suddenly vanish or slowly slip away. During these times, all our knowledge feels useless, trusted people aren't there for us, and God seems far away. The moment comes when we must choose to hold on or let go.

As the tension and terror of Holy Week built, I can't imagine what Jesus' mother, the disciples, Mary Magdalene, and all those who loved Jesus felt as they watched their hopes and expectations brutally die on the cross. Knowledge could not make meaning of what was happening, trusted people betrayed and denied, and all that God promised in Jesus seemed hopelessly far away. On a Friday afternoon, Jesus let go, and there was nothing left for his followers to hold on to, or so it seemed.

In my work as a psychotherapist and hospice chaplain, I talk about the Holy Week cycles in our own lives as times that cause us to examine all we thought we knew, expected, or believed. A moment will come when we realize God invites us to experience the Easter promise, firsthand, through the forever invitation of letting go and letting God.

Making It Personal: Reflect on a time of Holy Week in your life and where or how God invited you to trust and let go. Is God inviting you to let go of something in your life right now? How has God shown steadfast and healing love in your life?

Maundy Thursday

April 14, 2022

Origin and Omega

by Benjamin Thomas

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

—John 13:34

Today we begin one liturgy that spans three days, three services, and thousands of years—also known as the Paschal Triduum—all built on the holy soil of a new commandment to love one another. “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:34-35). Maundy Thursday expands our experience of the Word of God to include the fullness of God which dwells in Christ. From the Uncreated Light to that time when God will be all-in-all, as St. Paul writes, infusing all things from the inside out. From the light shining in the darkness to the darkness that ultimately cannot overcome it. From our origin to omega.

The questions around origin and omega have been with me since high school. I found myself often pondering, “How are we our own starting point and destination at the same time?” Yes, I was that kid. A little bit broody and very inquisitive about the nature of reality and the existential human condition. As I continue to ponder this same question, perhaps no closer to a definite answer than my younger self, it does seem to me that the foundation of wisdom and faith are built upon the mysteries of unknowing and of letting go, or self-emptying (kenosis), in order to more fully open to the love Jesus calls us to embrace. The brick-and-mortar of life in Christ is found in the vulnerable act of disrobing, filling a basin with water, kneeling on the ground, and liturgically washing off the very feet of those who are seeking but have not yet found what it is they so long for.

And so, on Maundy Thursday we find ourselves, like the altar, stripped bare and grappling with all that we are required to let go of in order to be fully present to whatever lies ahead. And it is from this place we behold

Good Friday

April 15, 2022

Is It Finished?

by Benjamin Thomas

*When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished."
Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

—John 19:30

Good Friday is dark. It holds much of the same somber feeling tones of Ash Wednesday, the day we receive the ashen cross on our foreheads that overlay the cross of chrism at our baptism. That day we remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return, the day that placed us on the journey through Lent.

Today, Good Friday, the church altar has been stripped, as well as the altar of our hearts, signifying the emptiness and abandonment we are to feel with Jesus. Today, we find ourselves in the second service in one liturgy spanning three days where Jesus is brutally and slowly murdered by a world that simply could not handle his vision of love. It appears that birthing conscious love into the world has everything to do with dying—a letting go in order to prepare our hearts to hold the profound love Jesus offered. But today we are witnessing death.

When Jesus said, "It is finished," and then bowed his head and died, I imagine how quiet it must have been in those moments following his death. Silent because they, like us, are grieving a loss too deep for words. There is no language that can begin to capture the magnitude of this loss. Our loss. The world's loss.

And yet, I also imagine that they must have wondered, as they were reeling from their loss, "Is it finished? Is it really and truly finished?" What a question to ask ourselves on Good Friday. A day where every single moment of a short earthly life, every prayer, healing, miracle, blessing, sermon, teaching, meal—are all bound together in the brutality of suffering. Jesus' entire life, work, and body ends up suspended on a cross in the most powerful posture of letting go the world has known.

Holy Saturday

April 16, 2022

Metamorphosis and Myrrh

by Benjamin Thomas

Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.

—John 19:39

Holy Saturday is quiet. It begins in the darkness of Good Friday and moves toward the light and promise of Easter. But not yet. Holy Saturday is liminal space. It is time outside of time between the brutality that got us here and the glory to come. Like a caterpillar soon to emerge a butterfly, but still cocooned in metamorphosis, we too are witnessing a metamorphosis on this threshold day. It is myrrh through and through; that ancient healing resin that is bittersweet yet cleanses and heals at the same time.

Years ago, while my wife and I were dealing with the surprising news that a fifth child was on his way, I happened upon a 1927 book, *A Bundle of Myrrh*. Inspired by this manual for a Franciscan Order, I began to learn more about the properties of myrrh. Myrrh was the primary ingredient in the anointing oil God commanded Moses to make in Exodus 30, a main ingredient in sacred oils used to anoint kings and priests, an embalming oil and, paradoxically, was also effective as a healing agent or salve for wounds. What I learned so closely reflected the coming of our unexpected gift, I knew immediately that I had found our son's true name: Myrrh Benjamin Thomas. Just as myrrh in the time of Jesus' life and death, our son's beloved presence in our lives has been profoundly healing and more precious than gold.

It is astonishing that Nicodemus, who first sought out Jesus in the dark of night, showed up in the morning daylight with a hundred pounds of myrrh—an extravagance almost beyond measure—and aloes in which to wrap Jesus' body. In this seemingly random quote from John, Nicodemus

Easter Sunday

April 17, 2022

Letting Come

by Robbin Brent, Jan Kwiatkowski, and Scott Stoner

But now the power of Easter has burst upon us with the resurrection of Christ. Now we find in ourselves a strength which is not our own, and which is freely given to us whenever we need it.

—Thomas Merton

Today is the day we celebrate and affirm that resurrection is real. Today we praise God for the resurrection of Jesus—that God did not allow death to have the final word in Jesus’ life. We praise God today that God continues to create resurrection in our world and in our lives—that death and loss are not the final word in our lives—not just in the world to come, but in our lives, right here, right now.

As we lift our hearts and voices in praise today, let us go one step further. Let us consciously awake and open our lives to receive the gift of resurrection that God intends for each of us. We have prepared ourselves to receive this gift by journeying together these last seven weeks. We have practiced letting go with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind.

Together we have practiced letting go of control, hurt and disappointment, of *shoulds*, and expectations. We have explored the connection between letting go and our health and well-being, as well as the connection between love and letting go. Now it is time to move beyond letting go and practice letting come. Now that we have made room by letting go, it is time to let God’s resurrecting power bring new life to every aspect of our being.

Now we can, with faith and thanksgiving, expect God to fulfill God’s promise that Thomas Merton offers us in the quote above. Let us call upon a strength not our own whenever we need it. Let our lives be blessed beyond measure as we joyfully receive this priceless gift made possible by the resurrection of Christ.

Quotes, Scripture, Prayers & Practices for Lent

Quotes

If we are willing to let go of the life we had planned, we will be empowered to embrace the life to which we are called, traveling distances we never dreamed possible.

—Bill Miller

You must learn one thing. The world was made to be free in. Give up on all other worlds except the one to which you belong. Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet confinement of your aloneness to learn anything or anyone that does not bring you alive is too small for you.

—David Whyte

Centering prayer is process oriented, as a thought comes up you let it go. It's not aiming for a state of stillness or a state of single point, for a single point clarity. Simply, you catch yourself thinking, you let the thought go. We participate release by release by release in patterning in the mind of Christ. ... This predisposition toward letting go, non-clinging, is the pathway to the mind of Christ.

—Cynthia Bourgeault

Letting go is all there is to do.

—Hugh Prather

Brooding over the past makes us less able to grow into the future. We have to learn to let things go. Not to bury them down but to truly let them go and trust ourselves to the future, generously and single-mindedly.

—Marcia Willett, *Winning Through*

If you love something, set it free.

—Multiple Sources



*You who are Light, enlighten us.
 You who are Wisdom, help us to be wise.
 You who are all Strength, make us strong.
 We ask only that we may know your truth
 and follow it with a simple heart.*

—Catherine of Siena

The Benedictine practice of Obedience is listening to what God is saying in all aspects of our life and responding to what is heard. We allow the choices and decisions of our life to become both a means to encounter God in the present moment, and a way to let go of the hidden motivations that limit our spiritual journey.

—Joan Chittister

I am one with my source insofar as I too act as a source, by making all I have received flow again.

—Raimon Panikkar

What would it be like to let go of wanting things to be other than they are?

—Byron Katie

And each season of fall reminds us again of Jesus' invitation to us to an autumnal experience of letting go and of dying—if we want to truly live, and be filled with the fullness of God.

—Br. Geoffrey Tristram

*Leave everything undefined,
 including yourself.
 Befriend uncertainty.
 Fall in love with mystery.
 Kneel at the altar
 of Not Knowing.
 Give your questions
 time to breathe.
 And the answers will find you.*

—Jeff Foster, *Undefined*

*Everything is laid out for you.
Your path is straight ahead of you.
Sometimes it's invisible, but it's there.
You may not know where it's going
But you have to follow that path.
It's the path to the Creator.
It's the only path there is.*

—Chief Leon Shenandoah

Please Come Home

*Please come home. Please come home.
Find the place where your feet know to walk
And follow your own trail home.*

*Please come home. Please come home,
you and you and you and me. ...
Thank you Earth for welcoming us,
and thank you touch of eyes and ears and skin,
touch of love for welcoming us.
May we wake up and remember who we truly are.
Please come home. Please come home. Please come home.*

—Jane Hooper

*Once you start to awaken, you realize how precious your time here is.
You are no longer willing to squander your essence on undertakings
that do not nourish your true self; your patience grows thin with
tired talk and dead language.
You see through the rosters of expectation which promise you safety
and the confirmation of your outer identity.
Now you are impatient for growth, willing to put yourself in the way
of change. You want your work to become an expression of your gift.
You want your relationship to voyage beyond the pallid frontiers to
where the danger of transformation dwells. You want your God to be
wild and to call you to where your destiny awaits.*

—John O'Donahue



Scripture

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! ...
I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

—Isaiah 43:18-19

*Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. “Anyone who intends to come with
me has to let me lead. You are not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run
from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. ... Self-
sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self.”*

—Matthew 16:24-26 (The Message)

*For unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.
But if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

—John 12:24

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

—Mark 10:21

*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it
up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have
power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this
command from my Father.*

—John 10:17-18

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It
does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice
in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.*

—1 Corinthians 13:4-7

*Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please
people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

—Galatians 1:10

Prayers

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.

—Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Serenity Prayer*

*Surely there is nothing to fear,
for you abide within us;
awaiting our awakening to your love.
And now, O loving Presence,
for what do I wait? [Amen.]*

—Psalm 39, Nan Merrill, *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*

Time after time I came to your gate with raised hands, asking for more and yet more.

You gave and gave, now in slow measure, now in sudden excess.

I took some, and some things I let drop; some lay heavy on my hands; some I made into playthings and broke them when tired; till the wrecks and the hoard of your gifts grew immense, hiding you, and the ceaseless expectation wore my heart out.

“Take, oh take” has now become my cry.

*Shatter all from this beggar’s bowl: put out this lamp of the importunate watcher:
hold my hands, raise me from the still-gathering heap of your gifts into the bare infinity of your uncrowded presence. [Amen.]*

—Rabindranath Tagore, *The Heart of God*

Grant me, O Lord, to know what I ought to know, to love what I ought to love, to praise what delights you most, to value what is precious in your sight, to hate what is offensive to you. Do not allow me to judge according to the sight of my eyes, nor to pass sentence according to the hearing of my ears; but to discern with a true judgment between things visible and spiritual, and above all things, always to inquire what is the good pleasure of your will. [Amen.]

—Thomas à Kempis



My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with and will never leave me to face my perils alone. [Amen.]

—Thomas Merton

*God be in our heads, and in our understanding;
 God be in our eyes, and in our looking;
 God be in our mouths, and in our speaking;
 God be in our hearts, and in our thinking;
 God be at our ends, and at our departing. Amen.*

—Anonymous

If God holds me, Why am I holding on? If ten fingers grasp, ten fingers can relax and let go forever / wanting and getting, having and losing, worrying and denying, judging and fearing, winning and losing. Today I hold onto nothing, Because God holds on to me. [Amen.]

—Hugh Prather

O God, who for our redemption gave your only begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

—Book of Common Prayer, p. 285

*God be your comfort, your strength;
 God be your hope and support;
 God be your light and your way;
 and the blessing of God,
 Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life,
 remain with you now and for ever. Amen.*

—New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 745

*Lord,
 it is night.
 The night is for stillness.
 Let us be still in the presence of God.
 It is night after a long day.
 What has been done has been done;
 what has not been done has not been done;
 let it be.
 The night is dark.
 Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
 rest in you.
 The night is quiet.
 Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
 all dear to us,
 and all who have no peace.
 The night heralds the dawn.
 Let us look expectantly to a new day,
 new joys,
 new possibilities.
 In your name we pray.
 Amen.*

—New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 184

Spiritual Practices for Letting Go

Receive & Release Prayer Practice

This prayer practice focuses on two words: receive and release. First, find a comfortable sitting position and begin to take deep, slow breaths. After you have relaxed and settled into the gentle rhythm of your breathing, begin to say the word “receive” silently in your mind each time you inhale, and the word “release” as you exhale. So, it’s “receive” as you inhale, and “release” as you exhale. These two words will also help to focus your mind whenever it begins to wander. As you repeat the word “receive,” imagine yourself receiving what God has to offer you and wants to give to you right now. As you repeat the word “release,” imagine yourself releasing to God what it is you need to let go of at this time. Start by doing this practice for three to five minutes (it can be helpful to set a quiet timer at the beginning). If you



have a particular prayer concern, you can use this practice to assist you in finding peace and guidance regarding your concern. Bring the concern to mind as you begin the “Receive, Release” practice. You may even find that you are given a different word or phrase that comes to mind to use in place of “receive” or “release.” You might, for example, find yourself mindfully repeating “patience,” “kindness,” or “forgiveness” on your in-breath and perhaps something like “control,” “anger,” or “judgment” on the out-breath.

Centering Prayer Practice

A way to sit with God without using language. It is to consent to the Divine Presence within. Dwelling in God who dwells in us. The present moment is where we meet God and where we have an opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of God’s love.

The Four Guidelines (from Thomas Keating, *Contemplative Outreach*):

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. (You can pray for God to give you an image/word that is just what you need at this time.)
2. Sifting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts,* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

*thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections

Loving-Kindness Prayer Practice

May you be happy.

May you be healthy.

May you be safe.

May you live with ease.

Each time you say this prayer, first think of those you love. Then, as you repeat the prayer, you may want to bring in those you don’t love, and those you have never met.

Welcoming Prayer Practice

When used consistently, this prayer practice has the capacity to quickly and effectively dislodge us from our habitual reactions, emotional patterns, and limiting comfort zones. Using it can help move us through challenging or painful experiences, times of disturbed emotion or anguish, and even moments where unhelpful control tendencies and self-inflation takes us over.

Three steps for the Welcoming Prayer Practice:

1. **Focus or “sink in”** to become aware and physically present to the particular experience or upset without analyzing or judging yourself or the situation. Don’t try to change anything at this stage—just stay present.
2. **Welcome and lightly name** the response that is being triggered by the difficult situation, such as “fear” or “anger” or “pain.” Acknowledge the response as sensation, and recognize that in this moment, if the experience is not being rejected or repressed, it can be endured. Ever so gently, begin to say “welcome,” such as “welcome fear,” “welcome resentment,” etc. Though this step is counter-intuitive and the impulse is most likely to try to push away the unpleasant emotion, Cynthia Bourgeault explains: “By welcoming it instead, you create an atmosphere of inner hospitality. By embracing the thing you once defended yourself against or ran from, you are actually disarming it, removing its power to hurt you or chase you back into your smaller self.”
3. **Transition to a “letting go,”** whereby the intensity of the situation can recede. This enables the natural fluidity of sensation to come and then go.

—For more on the Welcome Prayer/Practice, go to: <https://bit.ly/2Sqtj0R>

Living Well Through Lent 2022

Letting Go with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind

Designed for use as an individual reflection or for group study, this daily devotional provides a foundation for seeking a deeper experience of Lent, an experience that will help prepare us for the true meaning of Easter.

Includes reflections from:

- Robbin Brent
- The Rt. Rev. Brian Cole
- Amy Cook
- Dr. Sarah Robinson Flick
- The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski
- William “Father Bill” Miller
- The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner
- The Rev. Mary Bea Sullivan
- The Rev. Benjamin Thomas
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