

# 2022 LENTEN MEDITATIONS



Episcopal  
Relief & Development

Dear fellow travelers on the Way of Love,

We have arrived once again at this very holy time. The Lenten season is when we take stock of ourselves, from our sins to the many examples of God's grace in our lives. Because we are members of the Body of Christ, we discover these examples of grace through encounters with others—our family, friends, neighbors and all those who show God's liberating and life-giving Love to us.

As Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminds us, we can recognize God's Way of Love in unselfish, sacrificial and unconditional acts. At Episcopal Relief & Development, we are blessed to witness these acts in our partners' unconditional and sacrificial work across the globe. Our partners work to ensure that women live free from violence and are treated with dignity and respect. They help caregivers and community members support children to reach appropriate health and developmental milestones. They help community members work together to prepare for, adapt to and reduce risk from increasingly changing weather patterns. They help communities prepare for disasters, and they provide emergency help so that vulnerable groups can make full and sustained recoveries after disasters.

These acts of Love are signs of God's loving grace to us every single day. As you enter deeply into this holy Lent, we invite you to reflect on the unselfish and sacrificial works of our partners around the globe by reading the meditations of those who have witnessed this work firsthand. As you read, we invite you to reflect on similar acts you have witnessed as you walk the Way of Love. Where have you seen people reflect God's liberating and life-giving Love in your life and your community? Allow these meditations and your own reflections to bring you peace and hope and serve as a reminder that, in the end, Love wins.

Wishing you peace.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean McConnell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sean McConnell  
Senior Director, Engagement  
Episcopal Relief & Development

## ASH WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2

*Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart.\**

—Joel 2:12

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The Prophet Joel writes to us during a time of natural disaster. A plague of locusts has invaded the land, crops have failed, fire has “devoured the pasture of the wilderness” and the waters have dried up.

Yet in the midst of it all, God invites the people to return. Even when disaster follows disaster, when it is hard to find hope, the invitation stands: We can bring our heavy hearts to God.

When Joel hears this assurance of God’s faithfulness, he gathers the people. With a blast of the trumpet, he calls young and old to come together as one, to pray, and to ask for God’s help.

Thanks to the work of Episcopal Relief & Development, Episcopalians can also come together during times of disaster and despair. Knowing that God is with us, we can pray, ask for God’s help, and mobilize to provide for God’s people.

Today, as we are called to the observance of a holy Lent, may we remember that God invites us to return again and again, heavy hearts and all.



***The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, President of the House of Deputies of The Episcopal Church, on pilgrimage with Episcopal Relief & Development to visit the Early Childhood Development program run by the Zambian Anglican Council Outreach Program (ZACOP, 2019).***

\* Unless indicated, scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and used by permission.

Our work with Women focuses on helping communities promote the rights of women and children and move toward the vision that everyone deserves a life free from violence in a society where they are treated with dignity and respect. Only then can communities truly heal and thrive.

## ***The author of our meditations on Women is Lindsay Coates***

Lindsay Coates is a nonprofit executive with a legal background in civil rights, bringing together her passion for human rights, the social sector and global development. She is active as a speaker and writer on a range of topics around equity and inclusion. In writing these meditations, she relied on the advice and insight of former Episcopal Relief & Development Board member, the Rev. Genevieve Razim.



*Coates meets with BRAC Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative participants in Northern Bangladesh in 2018.*

Until recently, Coates was Managing Director of the BRAC Global Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative where she led the advocacy agenda to leave no one behind through effective, innovative and multi-dimensional solutions. She was also responsible for learning and technical assistance activities in over ten countries in Africa and South Asia. Before joining BRAC, Coates served as the President of InterAction, a coalition of NGOs working to address poverty and injustice. Coates has served on the steering committee of the World Bank Global Partnership for Social Accountability and the Partnership for Economic Inclusion, the Executive Committee for Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, and the boards of Episcopal Relief & Development, United States Global Leadership Coalition and Development Gateway. She also served on the Obama administration's Task Force on Global Poverty.

Prior to her work in the nonprofit sector, Coates practiced civil rights law in various capacities including beginning her law practice in Mississippi. She is a graduate of the University of the South (Sewanee) and the University of Mississippi School of Law.

THURSDAY, MARCH 3

*Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.*

—Martin Luther King Jr.  
*“Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom”*

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I take heart from the admonition of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to build the beloved community, a community in which everyone is cared for, absent of poverty, hunger and hate. To do this, we must do both the work we can see in the world and the work we cannot see through the senses—that “qualitative change in our souls... and in our lives.”

Through his lifetime of activism, King popularized the term and ideal of the *beloved community*. Many are fueled by faith that such a community is possible. However, within that call, my mind often jumps to racial reconciliation and healing across boundaries of color and ethnicity, language and custom. In taking that leap, even someone who calls herself a feminist passes over how women are excluded and must be intentionally brought into the beloved community. Why is that so? Perhaps it’s because patriarchy is so ingrained that even I, who rail against it, can miss it.

Today, and for the next several days, I invite you to pause with me and reflect on how gender bias and discrimination hold us back from realizing the full and beloved community of God’s people.

FRIDAY, MARCH 4

*And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.*

*—Matthew 14:21*

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UN Women reports that the COVID-19 crisis is reversing generations of progress for all people in poverty. Episcopal Relief & Development has found in its work that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, specifically in areas of health, caregiving, employment, poverty and domestic violence. Before the pandemic, the poverty rate for women was expected to decrease by 2.7% between 2019 and 2021. Projections now point to an increase of 9.1%. If we are to build the beloved community, we must focus on women.

What does it mean to focus on women? First, women must be seen and counted. In the feeding of the five thousand in Matthew's Gospel, we are told that five thousand men were fed, "besides women and children," who were not counted. If there were family groups, one might assume that women and children offered an equal number of hungry followers of Jesus. Are we counting the women? Is our work to build a beloved community focused on them?

SATURDAY, MARCH 5

*Just then, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.*

—Matthew 15:22-28

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We must also be open to seeing the women we may not want to see. As a crowd is surging around Jesus, an annoying foreign woman calls out for the Lord's attention in this story. Her actions and behavior are out of bounds. The disciples urge Jesus to send her away. But the woman is desperate, her need for her demon-possessed child is urgent, and she is undeterred by public embarrassment. Like the disciples, Christ diminishes her, likening her to a dog. Nevertheless, she persists.

As a young budding feminist, I saw this as a story about the superior spiritual tenacity of women—but that is in itself incomplete and sexist. I see now the relentlessness and intensity of women desiring a better life, whether others find them annoying or out of place. Our efforts to build the beloved community are best served when we focus on tenacious women who do not wait for our approval.

## MONDAY, MARCH 7

*Now, as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

—Luke 10:38-42

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This familiar story is often read as creating a dichotomy between two types of people – “the Marthas” and “the Marys.” But I have come to see Martha and Mary as two sides of the same coin. All women work, often with the same urgency and purpose as Justa (the Canaanite woman we read about yesterday) showed as she sought help for her daughter.

The busy Martha reminds me of another Martha encountered while on an Episcopal Relief & Development trip to Colombia. One day, we traveled by bus to the countryside to see the programs working with farmers, particularly women. The roads were rough; we asked too many questions, and we ran behind schedule. One of our last stops was at a small and hard-to-access farm. Our leader left us on the bus and checked if the female farmer we were to visit was ready to receive us. To the group leader's surprise (and, I think, our delight), she made clear that we were late. She had been waiting on us and didn't have much time to talk as she needed to go to the fields and check on her animals before dark. I loved that she had her work and that our approval as her “benefactors” was secondary. This woman was seen and counted by Episcopal Relief & Development. This Martha felt she should use her own time, in her own way that mattered for her.

TUESDAY, MARCH 8

*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.*

—Luke 1:52-53

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While individual stories are essential, any community is a system, a series of interlocking pieces. And some systems exclude and marginalize. Financial markets often fail or exclude women. While we might push and fight to change a system over the longer term, the “now” also demands our urgent attention.

Some of the most potent work of Episcopal Relief & Development, which I have seen in Latin America and Africa, are Savings with Education groups. These groups are primarily comprised of women. Savings groups offer critical financial and business training along with small business loans to individuals and groups. The savings groups develop micro-insurance products, village banks and cooperatives. Episcopal Relief & Development unleashes the latent power of groups excluded from a system and makes it manifest.

Participants in these groups get to see themselves as contributors to their community, making them and their community beloved.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9

*He has put my family far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me.  
My relatives and my close friends have failed me.*

—Job 19:13-14

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We look away from suffering because it frightens us. We are so accustomed to all the forms of violence against women, we can miss the suffering. War, forced migration, child marriage, rape, human trafficking, domestic violence, honor killings, denial of food or education and economic marginalization all feed into one another and support the cycle of poverty. According to the United Nations, one in three women will suffer some kind of gender-based violence in her lifetime. We do not want to see, and we look away from a thing so close to our experience and so ingrained in our lives.

Some of the most powerful work of Episcopal Relief & Development stands in solidarity, looks directly at this pain and works to eliminate it. In partnership with Islamic Relief USA, this work engages Christian and Muslim faith leaders in the process of discovery, reflection, discernment, scripture study and prayer. This process opens faith leaders' eyes to look, as if for the first time, at social phenomena so close they are easily missed. Beloved community moves closer to reality through this transformative work.

THURSDAY, MARCH 10

*Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?*

*—The Book of Common Prayer, p. 305*

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In 2017, I visited a village in northern Bangladesh to meet participants of a program designed to eradicate poverty. Despite barriers of language, culture and experience, I was moved and inspired by the women, who had a strong desire to share and connect. Our conversations were animated. When I asked one woman what had changed in her life, she left suddenly, and I feared I had offended her. Instead, she returned quickly, bringing with her a small and treasured written invitation to a party given by a more affluent family in her village. Before going through the program, her neighbors barely knew she existed, she said. Now, she was a recognized member of the community, invited into people's homes and weddings. In that moment, I understood how poverty isolated her from her community.

We often talk about extreme poverty that disproportionately affects women as an abstraction. The reality of living in extreme poverty is not just a lack of income. Millions of families cannot put food on the table, send their children to school, access basic health or provide a safe living environment. Too many still resort to child labor or child marriage. Often, these women are disconnected from markets and infrastructure. And increasing numbers are exposed to the tragic effects of climate change, conflict and displacement. As in the case of the women I met in Bangladesh, these challenges are compounded by a level of social isolation that renders it nearly impossible to overcome the poverty trap.

Respecting the dignity of every human being not only lives into the call of our Baptismal Covenant, but also it transforms lives. Reconciling women within their local communities builds our beloved community.

FRIDAY, MARCH 11

*Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.*

—Proverbs 31:25

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We know that we will not build a beloved community unless we see all the gifts and powers each human holds. Many of our traditions, though, hold us back. In most places, leaders, including faith leaders, are men. One need only look at our lectionary and traditional understanding of the Bible to see the ingrained minimization of women. Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute; Mary and Martha are two sides of the same coin and not opposites. Counting and identifying women who may be hidden by shame, marginalization and violence is both necessary and not enough. Women must be co-creators in building the beloved community. We must open our eyes to the power of women, ancient and modern. So, Lydia, who was prosperous and a financial backer of the disciples, tells us that we can all do the same today. What am I, as a woman with power and privilege, doing to build up other women and the beloved community?

SATURDAY, MARCH 12

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.\**

—Psalm 46:5

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Serving on the Board of Episcopal Relief & Development was a powerful experience, marrying my deepest feelings as a human with my vocation to fight poverty. So much of antipoverty work leans toward the technocratic: if we can just find the right vaccine, the right seed, the right method or tool, we will end poverty. All this is good and needed and not enough. Technocratic fixes are easier for leaders and politicians and governments to accept. The problems then are about money, time and logistics. Marginalization persists if we ignore the human sin and failings that feed poverty, violence and injustice.

Episcopal Relief & Development takes us to another route that is harder but also better. Its programs—when they all fall into place—are an alchemy of integrated interventions. Women who join savings groups can become leaders in their communities; women survivors of violence can become advocates and peace builders. Daughters and sons who see a mother with a voice in the home and community see different futures for themselves. The community changes slowly, and it changes in its heart. Hope and abundance are unlocked. When at our best, we can, with our local and interfaith partners, build a net of services and contacts—human contacts and relationships—that build a beloved community and the kingdom here on earth.

\* Psalm passages are from the Psalter in The Book of Common Prayer.

Our work with Children supports and protects kids under age six so they reach appropriate health and developmental milestones. This focus on early development is foundational and critical to helping children achieve their full potential as future contributing members of their communities.

***The author of our meditations on Children is the Rev. Abigail W. Moon***

The Rev. Abigail (Abi) W. Moon lives in Tallahassee, Florida, where she is the Interim Rector of St. John's Episcopal Church.

Raised as an "Army brat," Moon grew up moving every two to three years. In each new location, she discovered a deeper appreciation for people, culture and the divine. In seminary, Moon discovered Episcopal Relief & Development and fell in love with its sustainable and developmental practices. She served as the seminary liaison to Episcopal Relief & Development from The School of Theology in Sewanee, Tennessee, and has continued her support of the organization in parish ministry.

Living in Florida, she has seen the hard and compassionate work of Episcopal Relief & Development in action with her sister dioceses with the disaster relief offered after Hurricane Michael. She currently serves on the ONE THOUSAND DAYS OF LOVE campaign advisory committee and has participated in Episcopal Relief & Development's pilgrimage to Ghana.



*Moon with a student at an Anglican school in Bolgatanga, Ghana.*

MONDAY, MARCH 14

*Jesus said, "I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you."*

—Luke 6:27-28

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These words are hard to hear in the polarized modern world. Do good, bless and pray for those who have broken your heart, your body, your soul. When someone had been rude or hurt my feelings as a child, my mother used to tell me, "smother them in kindness." While this may or may not have been the only way to move forward, this scripture reminds me that loving our enemies means telling the truth, being kind, listening deeply and holding their story in our hands, too. With outstretched hands, we can be healers and bridge builders, able to change unjust systems and be transformed.

Children are the quickest to reach for our hand. Are we equally ready to reach out in love?

TUESDAY, MARCH 15

*The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.*

—Matthew 23:11-12

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Have you ever taken a moment to stop and really watch what is going on around you, to look and listen to each person that is working near you or walking by? Have you wondered for a moment who is the “greatest” among those around you?

Jesus’s words here remind us that the greatest among us is a servant, the one serving the other. We hear the echoes in the words of Fred Rogers, who said, “Look for the helpers.” When we need hope, we should look to those serving.

Children are always watching and learning. They are listening to what we say, and they are watching our actions—actions that often are louder than our words. Children call us out when our words and actions do not say the same message. Children know who the greatest people are in the community; they see kindness and love and are drawn to it.

Episcopal Relief & Development seeks to provide the best environment for children through health, nutrition, and education—signs of a community caring for its youngest. Take a moment today and stop. Look around you, and take in the servants in your midst that might have been missed initially. Be like a child and seek that love and kindness.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16

*Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him.*

– Matthew 20:20

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A parent's love is deeper than no other. This passage always makes me chuckle. Ms. Zebedee was just watching out for her boys. She wanted them to succeed, and she was going to do all that it takes. She even has the chutzpah to ask a favor of Jesus.

Jesus, of course, replies that she really doesn't know what she is asking of him or for her sons. But a parent's love is deeper than no other. Ms. Zebedee, as a mother, is willing to ask Jesus for what her heart desires. God, the father, is offering us his deepest desire that we might be united with God through love and compassion. Jesus's life is the love of God with us and for us. A parent's hope is that a child might flourish and be a testament of love.

When I see Episcopal Relief & Development's programs for children's health in the first six years of life, I am reminded that together we can be Ms. Zebedee, fighting for the opportunity for all the children of the world to flourish. What one thing can you do today to create the space for a child to flourish?

## THURSDAY, MARCH 17

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

*—Prayer attributed to Saint Patrick*

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We live in an uncertain world, and yet, we believe in the certainty of God's transformative love. Today is the feast day of Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland.

As a child in Great Britain, Patrick was abducted by pirates and then sold into slavery in Ireland. Even though he escaped, this experience formed his childhood and his life's work. In his adult life, he returned to Ireland as a priest and became their bishop. His life's work was to provide for the education and formation of those in Ireland.

Episcopal Relief & Development works tirelessly to provide education, wellness and health to the smallest of children, reminding them that they are not alone, that in the midst of uncertainty there is opportunity for comfort and restoration, change and transformation. In providing these resources, children are given the opportunity to see the change that they too can be.

## FRIDAY, MARCH 18

*Grant, O Lord, that as your Son Jesus Christ prayed for his enemies on the cross, so we may have grace to forgive those who wrongfully or scornfully use us, that we ourselves may be able to receive your forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

*—Holy Women, Holy Men  
Collect for Friday in the Second Week of Lent\**

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In the Old Testament, we hear about Joseph and his brothers. Joseph was the apple of his father's eye, which made his brothers green with envy. Their envy divided them, and they remained apart for many years until Joseph showed his brothers how to be in relationship again. Now, Joseph was fully human—and he was not an angel by any means—but he did not let their divisions win in the end.

In the northern part of Ghana, a multifaith collaboration through Episcopal Relief & Development provides clean water, sanitation and health education. Members of the community do not let faith divisions get in their way. Rather, they come together to collaborate so that all might drink clean water together, so that all might be well.

We are all brothers and sisters together in this world. How might we collaborate to eliminate divisions and share our resources with each other for the betterment of our global family?

\*Used by permission from the Domestic and Foreign Mission Society.

## SATURDAY, MARCH 19

*“Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what Jesus said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.*

— Luke 2:49b-52

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As a young child, Jesus found delight in listening, learning and being with God. It’s no wonder that when Mary and Joseph could not find Jesus, he was back in the temple in Jerusalem listening and learning. Children are sponges, ready to soak up knowledge and to grow in grace and wisdom.

Episcopal Relief & Development strives to assist all children so they may flourish in their first six years of life by providing maternal health programs, clean water and proper nutrition. These programs allow children to dance, sing and absorb all that they need to grow up and be who God is calling them to be.

When you realize that Jesus felt welcomed into his Father’s house, it is only natural that Jesus would also say “let the little children come to me” later in his own life. How do we welcome and provide a space for the youngest of these to flourish and thrive?

MONDAY, MARCH 21

*As the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God.*

*—Psalm 42:1*

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Ghana is a beautiful country with coastlines in the south, savannah in the northern region, and every climate in between. On the coast, in the larger cities you see Anglican schools providing education for all ages. At times, due to their low-lying elevation, they are flooded by the rains, prohibiting classes. In the north, it is dusty and dry. Water is scarce in the north, and the heat pounds down, making you seek shade and water.

As a deer longs for the water, our global community longs for refreshing physical water for nourishment and sustenance, for cooking and nutrition. They say when you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated. What do we thirst for in our lives? When will we realize that we long not only for water but also for God, for wellness and for wholeness?

Where can we, in the midst of our varied landscapes, quench our thirst?

TUESDAY, MARCH 22

*All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.*

*—Psalm 25:9*

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If there is one thing I have learned in this life thus far, it is that change takes time, and change takes all of our gifts and talents coming together for the common good. Love and faithfulness carry us through the challenges and the celebrations. Love and faithfulness never quit. Love and faithfulness transform. Each of us needs to experience love and faithfulness in our own lives.

Episcopal Relief & Development's work to empower parents and create economic stability in communities allows for families to provide the best environment possible for a child to experience love and faithfulness. The organization's support allows for change to be made, so that little by little, with all of us coming together, all might have a better chance to succeed and be those lights of love and faithfulness to the next generation. Take moments today to see how the light changes throughout the day. Be reminded that the sun's presence, just like God's love, is faithful in each moment, even in its reflection on the moon at night!

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23

*Give ear to our prayers, O Lord, and direct the way of your servants in safety under your protection, that, amid all the changes of our earthly pilgrimage, we may be guarded by your mighty aid; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

—*Holy Women, Holy Men*  
Collect for Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent\*

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A pilgrim can be defined as someone who travels on a long journey. This life we live is a pilgrimage and so are the daily mundane trips out of the house. As pilgrims, we are not alone. Pilgrims encounter those along the way who walk alongside them.

Episcopal Relief & Development has provided pilgrimages to individuals to open their eyes and hearts to the work that is being done in collaboration with their church and other partners worldwide. These pilgrims experience hospitality and love. At the end of one hot blistering day, one of these pilgrims was exhausted, thirsty, dirty and a bit lonely. On the walk back to the hostel for the night, a small child ran up and offered the pilgrim a piece of bread with the largest of smiles—a simple gift of nourishment and a smile.

Sometimes we need to see the bread incarnate, the little angel along the way, to remind us that we are not alone. Together, we have enough bread for the journey if only we extend our hand to those on our path with us. As we continue on this Lenten journey, where is the nourishment you need?

\*Used by permission from the Domestic and Foreign Mission Society.

Our work on Climate focuses on how families and communities can work together to adapt to the effects of rapidly changing weather patterns. This work includes preparing for and recovering from climate-influenced events such as floods, hurricanes and other disasters.

***The author of our meditations on Climate is Delia Heck, Ph.D.***

Dr. Delia Heck earned her Ph.D. in geography from the University of Washington. She teaches courses in environmental science, one health and physical geography at Ferrum College in southwestern Virginia. She is a member of Episcopal Relief & Development's Climate Resilience Community of Practice.

Dr. Heck has facilitated solar energy projects in Haitian villages to promote sustainable economic development, social justice and environmental stewardship. She led work on environmental justice and racism as a member of The Episcopal Church's Taskforce for Care of Creation and Environmental Racism. Dr. Heck now works with The Episcopal Church's COP26 delegation to provide resources prior to, during and after the meetings in Glasgow, Scotland.

She is actively engaged with the Southeast Climate & Energy Network/Southeast Faith Leaders Network faith working group. Dr. Heck also co-facilitates the working group on Climate Justice for the National Black Environmental Justice Network. Her summers are spent leading Ferrum College's Smith Mountain Lake Water Quality Monitoring Program. Dr. Heck is married to the Rev. John Heck and has two young adult sons, Benton and Peter.



*Dr. Heck and the Rev. Roger Bowen (former Director of Partnerships in Haiti) at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Boudin St. Pierre, Haiti. This was part of a larger listening session on community needs and how solar energy might help address those needs: ([kinshipwithhaiti.org/boudin-st-pierre](http://kinshipwithhaiti.org/boudin-st-pierre)). The parish is now in partnership with churches in the Abingdon Convocation of the Diocese of Southwestern Virginia.*

THURSDAY, MARCH 24

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

—Psalm 46:1-3

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I don't function well with uncertainty. I prefer predictable patterns, shared routines and clearly communicated expectations. This leaves less room for misunderstandings, conflict and ultimately, fear. Unfortunately, this preference is becoming increasingly challenging in our complex and dynamic world.

Climate change is altering atmospheric rivers, which disrupts precipitation patterns around the globe. Rains that once fell predictably no longer do, leading to an increase in severe droughts, crop failures and wildfires. Amounts of precipitation normally received in a year can fall in a matter of hours, leading to devastating floods. This can cause significant loss of life, property and agricultural goods. What was once predictable and reliable has now become uncertain, threatening and fear-inducing.

The psalmist reminds us that God's presence allows me to face the tumult and uncertainty without fear. God strengthens me, even if I cannot plan for every contingency or figure out every detail. I may not be able to reduce the uncertainty that climate change is bringing to my life, but I can work on eliminating the fear. I can also work with others to prepare for climate-related disasters and the recovery efforts afterward, knowing that God walks with us through the changing landscape and patterns of our lives.

FRIDAY, MARCH 25

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

—Isaiah 43:1b-3a

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Twice a month, I am part of Episcopal Relief & Development's Climate Resilience Community of Practice (CR COP). This global group of practitioners shares knowledge, best practices, testimonials, personal encouragement and prayer to build climate resilience. The faithfulness and the dedication of these folks is inspiring.

Climate resilience is the adaptive capacity of a socioecological system to absorb stresses and maintain function in the face of stresses from external climate change. While the causes and broad impacts of these changes are global, resilience efforts are implemented at the asset, community or individual level. This is what makes the work of the CR COP so valuable. Resilience is built in context with practices adapted to local conditions.

Like climate resilience, spiritual resilience is best developed individually, in the family and within communities. When adversity hits, resilience allows us to manage life's circumstance, hardships and challenges. It begins with a belief that God is with us through every fire and raging river. It continues with seeking out communities of practice within a parish or community. As with the CR COP, cultivating our spiritual resources helps build capacity for spiritual resilience.

SATURDAY, MARCH 26

*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

—John 6:35

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Food is a basic necessity of life. Thriving individuals and families have enough healthy and nutritious food to not only survive but also to grow and develop. It is why in schools around the world, feeding programs are an integral component for success. Thriving communities not only feed themselves but also engage in sustainable agricultural practices, protect the environment and generate additional income.

We can fail to thrive spiritually as individuals or communities. We get "stuck in the muck" and stop growing and developing. We find ourselves separated from God by our words, our actions and even our thoughts. We forget that forgiveness is foundational to our relationship with God. Our sin and shame stop us from accepting the forgiveness that God provides. It can be difficult to accept that we are all invited to the table that sets us free from all our mistakes, errors and faults. Jesus became the bread of life that allows us to thrive in all that we do. We are invited to come to the table where we will never be hungry and we will never again be thirsty. It is up to us to accept the invitation and partake of the forgiveness that awaits us all.

MONDAY, MARCH 28

*Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."*

—John 8:12

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It is a scary thing to be tossed about in a storm on the ocean. Uncertainty and fear often arise. If vessels lose their way, they can crash upon the shore. The first lighthouse in recorded history, the Pharos of Alexandria, Egypt, was built around 280 BCE to help guide ships safely into port.

Sometimes life can feel like we are in a stormy sea. When families and communities lack the resources to recover from climate-influenced disasters, uncertainty and fear are constant companions. But we can provide light and life to those communities and families. Programs such as Savings with Education groups provide financial training for families to save money to pay for school and plan for unanticipated emergencies. These programs provide resources to help families get back on their feet after disasters and strengthen communities so they can maximize earning power and potential. This stability brings peace that calms fears.

The peace that surpasses all understanding comes from the light of the world. Jesus proclaims himself to be that light. Those who chose to follow that light find peace in a troubled sea. Jesus's great love for us shines in the darkness and will lead us safely to shore.

TUESDAY, MARCH 29

*He shall come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth.*

—Psalm 72:6

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Water is vital to our survival as a species. More than 2.2 billion people lack safely managed drinking water, while 4.2 billion lack safely managed sanitation.\* This leads to increased exposure to waterborne illness, malnutrition, poverty and even death. Yet, we have the knowledge and technology to address these challenges. We can dig wells, ponds and irrigation ditches, build piping systems, install rain water catchments, and construct water stations, sanitary toilets, and safe waste disposal systems. The question is whether we, as a global community, have the political, social and economic will to actually do so.

This is similar to God's grace and mercy in my life. I understand the concepts. I even try to meditate and practice centering prayer. I feel God's grace like rain falling down on me, washing away my sins. Yet, I seldom act as if God's unrelenting mercy and unending grace change anything. Only occasionally do I love recklessly, giving away grace and mercy as if they were a shower falling upon the newly sheared grass. If I did, I would see this shared love bring back life and new growth in myself and the people around me. Knowledge and practices are helpful, but without the will to use them, they do little good.

\* [un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/](http://un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30

*Let all that you do be done in love.*

*—1 Corinthians 16:14*

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The summer of 2021 was characterized by record-breaking natural disasters, including heat domes, wildfires, drought, massive flooding, mudslides and other extreme weather events. They developed from the numerous interconnections and feedback loops fed by interactions and energy fluxes between the atmosphere, hydrosphere and lithosphere. Such compound events emerge as the climate system is unable to cope with the combination of causes. As this pattern is only like to intensify in the near future, it becomes necessary to anticipate, resist, cope with and recover from climate-influenced hazards and events.

When we are in the midst of disasters it is easy to become overwhelmed by darkness and pain. We can get angry, doubting God's love, kindness and assurances. This is especially true when we pray for things that are not granted. If we are open to them, these trials can be blessings in disguise. God uses all of us to share the love that binds us together. In love, we can work together to prepare for, cope with and emerge from these storms of life. We have to remember that we are not alone and that God's love is strong enough to face any compound event and recover from it.

THURSDAY, MARCH 31

*Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

—Romans 5:5

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The most effective response to climate-influenced disasters is to prepare for them. To do this, communities need tools to identify their vulnerabilities in order to better protect themselves. Zimbabwe has a traditional practice known as *Zunde Ramambo* or the “Chief’s granary.” Community members plant crops on a piece of land whose harvest is not used immediately. It is reserved for those who are in need—widows, orphans, the elderly, the vulnerable and those who are marginalized. The granary acts as a food bank so that the local leader always has a harvest for those who are unable to provide for themselves. This practice lessens the impact of droughts, pests, floods and other disasters. It helps minimize the suffering and damage that can hinder the recovery process.

We too can prepare for the difficult seasons we encounter. In the abundant seasons, it is easier to see God’s love, mercy and grace. Hope is close at hand. In the challenging seasons, we can lose hope and forget that we never walk alone. Identifying our vulnerabilities and finding spiritual resources can assist us when we walk in fear. It is our spiritual practices engaged in on a daily basis that help us move through those challenging times.

FRIDAY, APRIL 1

*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

*—John 15:13*

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Changes in the global climate exacerbate climate hazards and amplify the risk of extreme weather disasters. This creates unwanted, adverse effects with economic, environmental, political and social impacts. Variability in the number and magnitude of these hazards is normal. However, in the last twenty years climate-related disasters have increased 83%. If climate risk cannot be avoided then it must be managed by accepting, reducing, controlling or transferring it.

I suspect most of us would rather transfer unwanted, adverse effects to someone else. Perhaps we might bear them for our loved ones and closest friends. As our connection weakens, our willingness to accept the consequences usually lessens. While it is noble to think we would lay down our lives for our friends, our basic instinct is to survive—to reduce, control or even transfer risk elsewhere.

That is the wonder of Jesus's journey to the cross. Our risk was transferred to Jesus, and he accepted it. He laid down his life for us, and, in doing so, he demonstrated the most powerful love of all: a love sets us free and never leaves us to face life's risks alone.

SATURDAY, APRIL 2

*So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*

—2 Corinthians 5:17

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One Health is a collaborative effort to attain optimal health for people, animals, plants and the environment. This approach is especially relevant as we experience the impacts of climate change. At times, it seems the world is alternately flooding, burning, melting, heating up, drying out, intensifying, breaking, dying, eroding, acidifying, reducing and sickening. How can we avoid experiencing climate grief in the midst of such a world?

We do so by engaging in a process of lamentation, repentance, renewal and action. It begins with an expression of great sorrow for what is occurring and our role in it. This lamenting only takes us so far unless it is followed by a change of heart. When we take responsibility for how we have failed God's creation, we are called to turn from our past actions. It is then possible to boldly trust that out of ashes and death, God makes all things new. From a place of renewal, we are able to engage in tangible actions that demonstrate a shared vision of a loved, redeemed and healthy world. It is through Jesus, the way, the truth and the life, that we find optimal health for all of creation.

Our work on Disaster Resilience & Response offers resources and training to help communities prepare for disasters and provide emergency support to help vulnerable groups of people make a full and sustained recovery. Our church partners are an integral part of these communities; because of our ongoing relationships we are there before others arrive and stay with them for the years of recovery that follow.

***The author of our meditations on Disaster Resilience & Response is the Rev. Stacy Stringer***

The Rev. Stacy Stringer serves as the Director of Disaster Recovery for the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. She did not choose this vocation, but it chose her after a record-breaking storm devastated the community in which she was serving as rector.

Stringer leads a long-term disaster recovery program that equips diocesan congregations to serve their vulnerable neighbors by matching their gifts with needs articulated by community members. This unique program, supported by a partnership between the diocesan Quin Foundation and Episcopal Relief & Development, fills gaps in survivor needs that few other agencies can.

Stringer was ordained to the priesthood in 2009 after earning a Master's of Divinity at the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas. Prior to seminary she worked in the energy industry.

She has witnessed how disasters arrive in different forms, each bearing hidden gifts. When the uninvited came in the crumbling of a corporation and then in a community under floodwaters, she listened for Christ's call and later witnessed scripture's promise: "Behold, I am about to do a new thing."



*Stringer says this photo was taken on "move-in day for a family of seven children and a single mom. Through a seven-organization partnership, we replaced their mobile home and outfitted it. The family joined one of our churches and is in a continued relationship with one of their small group ministries. This was such a blessing for us all."*

MONDAY, APRIL 4

*So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.*

*—Galatians 6:9*

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Too much water is a disaster. Too little water is a disaster. Mr. Martinez, who survived a fierce Texas storm, understood both disasters. After the flood, there was no running water inside the house, so he showered and washed dishes outside.

The disaster continued for Mr. Martinez when irreparable storm damage to the foundation left his house vulnerable to the next storm. This house, this land, was home. His family had made a life here for generations. The only way he could stay was if his house was rebuilt from the bottom up.

Partners from two local Episcopal churches, our diocesan team, two international nonprofits and Episcopal Relief & Development pooled their resources. Building plans, schedules, funding and volunteers were ready. Then it rained. Record-setting rain struck again. More delays. More outdoor showers.

Mr. Martinez was prayerful, patient, helpful on the worksite and optimistic. The project leaders were prayerful and tenacious, and they used the forced timeout to design a drainage system for the property. Mr. Martinez's new home would be equipped with more resiliency to withstand the impacts of climate change.

Thanks to unwearying servants, the harvest of a solid family home with water where it belongs will be reaped in God's good time.

TUESDAY, APRIL 5

*The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.*

—Matthew 4:16

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Three sisters attend church together. One is in her early twenties and the head of their household. The other two are teenagers who take turns as acolytes. Beneath the surface of lighting altar candles exists a dark story of deep loss. A few years earlier, after their home and neighborhood were ravaged by a hurricane, domestic violence orphaned these three.

The vicar of this church had witnessed how personal disasters follow natural disasters in vulnerable communities. Following his vision for storm recovery, we became partners in a culturally appropriate behavioral health program. Strategically located on the church property, this was a place of safety, confidentiality and trust for the people to be served.

When tragedy struck, the church was the consoling Body of Christ, and a counselor was already in place to support and advocate for the girls. Their journey forward is with a church family willing to stand inside the girls' pain as they live with their own.

The girls will keep lighting altar candles. It doesn't look like an act of courage and love, but it is. The light shines on a congregation who knows what it means to walk in darkness and see a great light.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted...to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes.*

—Isaiah 61:1, 3a

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The journey toward recovery after a disaster is exponentially more arduous for our most vulnerable sisters and brothers. The Church does what few can, bringing gifts of compassion, talent and resources to ease the trip.

A youth group traveled far to bring their gifts to southeast Texas and the home of Mrs. Gray. They were excited to begin transforming a wrecked house into a tidy, safe home.

A sense of accomplishment combined with helping someone in need is a good thing, but delays are inevitable on worksites. The youth did not grow frustrated with delays. They waited for instructions, chatted with the matriarch and looked around for something that needed doing.

When asked what made the biggest impact during their week of service, several spoke of transforming a disarray of yard rocks into a rock garden. Mrs. Gray cried when she saw it. The rocks were gifts from her children. Each time they traveled, they brought back to her a rock and a story.

The youth group didn't finish fixing the house, but they filled Mrs. Gray's heart with love and joy. Knowingly or not, they had been anointed to approach those rocks as the sacrament they were.

## THURSDAY, APRIL 7

*One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"*

—John 6:8-9

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A friend wrote recently, "Don't let what you cannot do get in the way of what you can do." This sounds like a no brainer, but it is a message I repeat to myself often.

In disaster recovery, discerning what we can do is a daily, even hourly exercise. We cannot move whole communities to safer places. We cannot secure stable, dignified, fair wage jobs for families living in poverty. Even with amazing funding from committed Episcopal organizations, there remains much that we cannot do.

Yet, at the same time, I witness how generosity in all sizes and shapes unlocks abundance, which in turn catalyzes transformation, both for the giver and the receiver. I recall Tim, the construction worker, who gave his limited time and material resources to repair one more room for a family whose roof he had repaired with our grant dollars. I recall the flurry of unsolicited donations sent to one of our congregations after word spread about the grant they received for repairing mobile homes damaged by an unexpected winter freeze.

Generosity is contagious. It sparks possibilities. Trust God with what you can do, and don't let what you can't do get in the way.

FRIDAY, APRIL 8

*Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick.*

—Matthew 12:18, 20a

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They live in a cluster of homes in the woods because invisibility helped them survive violence in their home countries. Courageously seeking refuge in the United States, these families take hard jobs in exchange for a safer life. When a series of natural disasters bruised this fragile safety, the residents were cautious about asking for help.

Ava, a second-generation immigrant, had chosen a life of advocacy for other immigrants struggling to shape new lives free from fear. She walks alongside the families in this hidden hamlet. She comes through for them. She holds hope for them.

One day Ava spoke of a faith community that had resources for repairing houses ruined by the storms. Because they trusted Ava, the neighbors agreed to trust this Episcopal congregation. Houses slowly became homes again.

In honor of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Ava brought a troupe of Aztec dancers to the community. The residents invited the Episcopalians, who brought homemade tamales. The moonlit lot was ablaze with beauty, sustenance and reverence for *La Virgen* and each other.

Respect for the dignity of all and joy in meeting new people propel this congregation into service. It's what transforms helpers into friends.

## SATURDAY, APRIL 9

*There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
like the wideness of the sea.  
There's a kindness in God's justice,  
which is more than liberty.*

—Hymnal 1982, #469, 470

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The best preparation for a disaster is knowing your neighbor. Of course, readiness includes securing emergency supplies, information and property protection. Our survival instinct is good. God gave us that instinct as a part of God's mercy. That mercy is also divinely designed to flow through us so that when crisis arrives, we can widen our reach beyond ourselves and our comfortable circles.

I know an Episcopal church that didn't know they were preparing for a disaster when they relocated. They simply opened themselves to God's call to love others, no matter where they were on their journey. They set to the task of intentionally getting to know their neighbors. It started one conversation at a time. They listened deeply and asked questions like, "What do you need the most right now?"

These kindnesses grew into a food and diaper pantry and a ministry of phone check-ins. When storms struck, the church quickly connected with their at-risk neighbors. When the pandemic arrived, they modified some methods of outreach, but they kept their arms wide open and God's mercy flowing.

Knowing our neighbors before the storm is a lifeline each congregation or individual can extend. If not us, then who?

MONDAY, APRIL 11

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,  
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,  
and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,  
and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

—“Lord of the Dance” (*I Danced in the Morning*)\*

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Susan and her seven children burst forth from the car and danced. It was move-in day.

Two years earlier, she evacuated her children from their mobile home as floodwaters rose with shocking speed. Their journey to safety involved the bucket of a front-end loader and a temporary shelter. Once the roads were passable, Susan began looking for help to repair her home.

Across town, a pastor equipped members of the small-group ministries with gift cards and issued a challenge to use them for storm relief in the community. One group learned about a mother of seven seeking assistance. With Susan’s permission, they visited her home and found it beyond repair.

“We’ll get them a new one,” the group clamored, not knowing how. Challenges and obstacles abounded, but that did not deter the Lord of the Dance who led the church group to one willing partner after another. The dancers grew in number because they were invited.

The Lord of the Dance comes in disguise when he invites us to dance, even as a mother. No matter that we don’t know this dance; it’s not about perfection. It’s about following him one step at a time, trusting his lead.

\* Words: Sydney Carter. Music: Shaker melody; adapt. Sydney Carter. © 1963 Stainer & Bell, Ltd. (Admin. Hope Publishing Company, [www.hopepublishing.com](http://www.hopepublishing.com)). All rights reserved. Used by permission. Reprinted under license #RP081721-1

TUESDAY, APRIL 12

*Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins.*

*—Isaiah 58:1*

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“Why don’t they move someplace safer?” Folks often ask this question about residents in neighborhoods that suffer repeat natural disasters. One reason is because these homes are losing value, and safer houses are out of reach for individuals with humble resources. Furthermore, some are blessed to live in the home that birthed generations of their own family. Those walls hold cherished history. The neighborhood is all they’ve ever known. Our elders wish to age in place with wisdom and grace.

James wanted to bring his mother back home after the big storm, but the house was uninhabitable. The insurance company claimed that wasn’t the fault of the storm, even though James felt the foundation shifting and cracking that unforgettable night. He trusted his God-given voice could get the house repaired and his mother’s last wish honored, and we heard his call.

We used resilient repair designs and materials so this home will better withstand the next storm. James and his neighbors are using their voices to shout for justice in city drainage designs. These homes are made of wood and stone but also of dignity and love. They shout out with hope. Let us who have ears to hear, listen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13

*Can God set a table in the wilderness?*

*—Psalm 78:19b*

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While experiencing my first extreme disaster as the head of a congregation, I looked to local officials for guidance. I was shocked to discover that we, the church, were the leaders I was looking for. After underestimating what this Body of Christ had to offer, we put those gifts to work connecting, convening, and communicating. Gathered around a dozen folding tables in our parish hall, supplied with coffee and snacks, a FEMA-recognized disaster recovery team coalesced that still serves today.

A few counties away, another congregation immediately knew what to do. Their ministry was configured for such an occasion. When they heard about a mile-long street of significantly impacted immigrant families, they swiftly and humbly offered gifts of cooked food and a phone-charging station.

The church members were respectful, so they were welcomed, and with the residents' permission and invitation, they returned regularly. Over time, these meals transformed a street of strangers into neighbors helping neighbors and food recipients into volunteers.

As Episcopalians, we gather around Christ's table to be transformed "that we may worthily serve the world in his name." I learned that this table can be set anywhere God's people need hope and healing.

## MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 14

*I give you a new commandment, that you 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, if you have love for one another.*

—John 13:34-35

You may remember the words to that song that many of us sang as children: “They’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” This is the sign to the world that we are followers of Jesus, that we love one another. On Maundy Thursday, Jesus gave us a new commandment: that we love one another the way that Jesus loves us.

How does Jesus love us? Jesus’s love is unselfish. It is sacrificial. It is unconditional. Jesus’s love seeks the good and the welfare and well-being of others. And you know what else? Jesus’s love is revolutionary. It is powerful. When we love others the way that Jesus loves us, we can change the world.

I truly believe that nothing in this world has ever changed for the good apart from somebody living the way of love. My father had polio as a boy. And the work of Jonas Salk and those who brought us the polio vaccine was done for the good, for the welfare and well-being of others. This was an unselfish act. That way of love was a revolutionary source for change.

This Maundy Thursday, I invite you to think about how that liberating and life-giving love has changed your life and how you can show others you are a follower of Jesus by your love.

***The Most Rev. Michael Curry,  
Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church***

*The Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, and Teri Lawver, Board Chair for Episcopal Relief & Development and Global Commercial Strategy Leader and Global Vice President for the Immunology Therapeutic Area with Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson, are pictured together visiting Episcopal Relief & Development partners in Sri Lanka, 2019.*



## GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 15

*Only when we're brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the power of our light.*

*—Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead by Brené Brown\**

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I first heard Brené Brown speak at The Seminary of the Southwest, shortly after she published *Daring Greatly*. Since then, Brown's work has indeed transformed the way I live, love, parent and lead. It has also heavily influenced how I approach my faith, the story of Jesus Christ and what it means to love *with our whole hearts*.

In this context, why does the Passion from John, today's Gospel, resonate so timelessly with our human experience? Perhaps it's because the pain of feeling abandoned in a moment of need is all too common a human experience, as is the pain of recognizing when we may have abandoned someone else in need. Most of us can point to a time in our lives when, despite our best, heartfelt intentions, we just couldn't find the strength to be vulnerable and walk with someone through their pain and instead turned away from the suffering.

Episcopal Relief & Development, together with local Anglican and other ecumenical partners, is committed to walking together with those in need whom we seek to serve. We compassionately explore the sources of suffering and pain to help find transformational solutions. Only through devotion to listening, learning, understanding and working together, can we empower individuals and communities to achieve lasting change. Through this approach, we empower women to live free from violence and help build capabilities supporting financial literacy, leading to economic stability and health for the whole family. We partner on programs to promote a healthy start for children, with an emphasis on the critical first 1,000 days of life. And we engage with communities to promote climate resilience.

This work can be challenging, exceptionally so in the midst of a global pandemic where compassion fatigue seems to be widespread. Yet, God calls us to be brave in engaging with these global challenges and, together in love, discovering the extraordinary power of our light.

\* Brené Brown, Ph.D., LMSW, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012)

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## HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 16

*O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

*—The Book of Common Prayer, p. 283  
Collect for Holy Saturday*

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I heard a legend once that goes like this: “A young girl asks her bishop, ‘what does Jesus do on Holy Saturday?’” Quickly the bishop responds, ‘He goes into hell to find his good friend Judas.’” The Apostle’s Creed and scripture remind us of the infinite scope of the salvation of God in Christ. It includes even hell and those who have been condemned there. The church may pause and prepare each year on Holy Saturday. However, on THE Holy Saturday, Jesus was not resting but busy indeed! Long before the women witnessed the empty tomb, he had been to “hell and back.” The coming and going of Jesus as he makes his salvation journey reminds us that he was a high-touch savior, concerned with our bodies, souls, hearts and minds. He touched and allowed others to touch him. This remains true today of the Eternal One.

We, the Body of Christ, are called to touch lives with the salvation of Jesus. May our hearts be always prepared to serve the one who died and rose again for the sake of all.

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***The Right Rev. Mary Gray-Reeves is the Managing Director of the College for Bishops and a former member of the Board of Directors of Episcopal Relief & Development.***

## EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 17

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.*

—Luke 24:1

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Sabbath ends about an hour after sunset, when the first night star appears. Do we think that is when the women gathered (in a lean-to perhaps), carrying the nard, myrrh and aloe, the salve that stays the smells of decomposition? We can imagine they were very quiet, some with tears rolling down their cheeks, others with grief locked deep in their throats. Some remembered the last loved one's body they had prepared. Others thought of the kindness in this friend, their Teacher and Lord. How long would they work? How long to infuse the oils and build the salve? The gospels are silent.

John tells us it was still dark when they set out for the tomb. Perhaps they waited for the moon to set. Perhaps they took to the emptiest roads, kept to the darkest shadows, dodged the soldiers and thieves and night animals. They carried something both expensive and precious. They carried each other.

During this year, COVID's shadow continues to extend across the globe, and floods and fires and sickness and human failings darken our sense of future and possibility. Easter again begins in the dark. It begins in the grief and the silence. It gathers in our compassion and kindness. It touches us one tiny pinprick of care at a time. Let us lean into the wind with the women, in fear yes, but in growing determination. For we know something they were about to learn. That salve holds light and grace and hope too. He lives!



*Abigail Nelson is Executive Vice President for Episcopal Relief & Development.*

Thank you for your generous support of Episcopal Relief & Development. We are deeply grateful for your continued partnership and faith in our mission. With your support, our work with Anglican and ecumenical partners created sustainable, transformational change in over 2.3 million lives in the United States and around the world in 2021.

The world needs us now, especially as the pandemic continues to reverse many of the gains made in the last decade. Our vital programs are enabling women to live free from gender-based violence, supporting healthy starts for children, in particular during the first 1,000 days of life, and helping communities adapt to a changing climate. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Let us remain steadfast in working together for lasting change with compassion and dignity in 2022 and beyond. Thank you again for your partnership.

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