

# From Ashes to Easter



## Nearer, My God, to Thee: Journey to the Cross

Lutheran Church of the Reformation

Lent 2024

Cover Art by Aksel Moeller

# From Ashes to Easter

## The Meditations of Our Hearts

By Members & Friends of this Community

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## **Worship Times at Lutheran Church of the Reformation**

For details and links for the Worship services,  
visit: [www.ReformationDC.org/worship](http://www.ReformationDC.org/worship)

### **Ash Wednesday**

February 14th

Ashes to Go (Outside): 9am-12p.m.

Ash Wednesday Service - 7:00 p.m.

### **Holy Week Services**

Maundy Thursday, March 28th - 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, March 29th - 7:00 p.m.

### **Easter Morning**

March 31st - 8:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

*Easter Morning Brunch at 9:30am*

*We give thanks for all of the saints who have journeyed before us and all those who have crafted this annual devotion for 38 volumes.*

## FROM OUR COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Welcome to "From Ashes to Easter." This year's theme is "Nearer My God to Thee: Journey to the Cross" and these daily devotions are designed to accompany you on a spiritual journey during the holy season of Lent.

Lent offers us an opportunity to pause, turn inward, and draw closer to our faith. It is a season that invites us to examine our lives, seek repentance, and embrace the abundant grace and mercy of God. Through intentional reflection and prayer, we can experience a deepening of our spiritual connection and a renewed commitment to living out our faith.

Within these pages, you'll find a collection of daily devotions crafted by Reformation members to guide you through the 40 days of Lent. Each devotion presents a reflection on a Scripture passage, providing a framework for personal meditation and spiritual growth. As you engage with these devotions, I hope that you may find solace and a renewed sense of purpose.

Prepare your heart, open your mind, and surrender your spirit as we embark on this meaningful journey. May these Lenten devotions illuminate your path, deepen your relationship with Jesus, and provide inspiration on how we can become our best selves serving God by serving our community.

Peace be with you,  
Mike Thompson

## One Way to Use this Booklet:

**Opening:** Trace a small cross on your forehead to remind yourself of the ashes that you received,

*Today, let my heart be good soil,  
open to the seed of your word.*

**Scripture:** Find the Scripture passage for the appropriate day. You will find this located at the top right of each page. Some authors have also included a specific ‘focus verse’, as well, before their devotion.

**Reflection & Pray:** After reading the assigned Scripture passage, read the words from the author of the daily reflection. Pray with the author at the end.

**Closing:** Take a moment to reflect, breathe, and then go in peace.

February 14

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2

### **The Coming of the Lord**

*“Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
sound the alarm on my holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near!”* Joel 2:1a

I am surprised by the impact this scripture has upon me. The prophet Joel makes it clear that something important is about to happen. The “day of the Lord” will soon occur. Get ready. Blow the trumpets. Prepare. For what? Prepare for the coming of the Lord.

Could this be a message for us? Yes. Today is Ash Wednesday. Today is the beginning of Lent.

The ashes of death on this day mark the death of the ordinary and the beginning of the faith journey that we enter into on our pilgrimage to the holy week and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. This is our call to prepare for the coming of the Lord.

*Lead me and all your children into a deeper life of faith and a deeper journey into a life of loving service to others.*

### Daniel's Prayer

*"I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.... Indeed, the Lord our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice." Daniel 9:2, 14*

Familiar episodes surround this prayer: Daniel and his companions decline the Babylonian king's food and wine, continuing their dietary regimen; Daniel interprets dreams accurately, to delight and chagrin; three men survive a fiery furnace unscathed; Daniel decrypts handwriting on the wall; Daniel survives a lions' den; Daniel describes his own prophetic visions.

These incidents signal God's protection for faithful observers. Yet even though Daniel and his companions ascend to prominence, their fates rise and fall drastically, and exile continues for them, and for God's displaced people.

I count four different kings named during Daniel's long career. He says that calamity reflects Israel's chronic disobedience and defiance. How long is seventy years? ... New York Giants win the World Series ... Supreme Court issues unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* ... Condoleezza Rice, Jackie Chan, John Travolta, Denzel Washington, and Ron Howard are born ... "under God" is added to the Pledge of Allegiance ... Soviet Union transfers Crimea to Ukraine ... mass polio vaccination begins ... The Fellowship of the Ring is published ... Tonight Show and Miss America Pageant debut on television ... first Burger King opens ... first TV dinner appears in supermarkets ...

*Lest our feet, stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,  
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand,  
True to our God,  
True to our native land.*

*(Lift Every Voice and Sing, LBW #562)*

February 16

Friday

2 Timothy 4:1-5

### **In and Out of Season**

*“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.” 2 Timothy 4:1-2*

I was very excited this year to be assigned a text that made “sense” for FATE! In previous years, I have found myself perplexed by passages in Scripture that seem to have very little to do with everyday life. 2 Timothy 4:1-5, however, is extremely applicable! (verses 3-5 especially so in an election year like this one of 2024, but I won’t be writing about those).

What stuck out to me when I first read this passage was the phrase “in season and out of season”. At first, this conjured images of produce in my mind, but then I got to thinking about what it means to be prepared ‘in and out of season’ with ‘patience and careful instruction’.

There are certainly times in my life where I feel I know what I should do, even what I want to do, but I just do not have the time, energy, or bandwidth.

Maybe I feel I want to check-in on a friend who is struggling or I have some task at work I’ve been putting off.

Instead of shaming myself, what has helped me is investigating what I need from myself first, so that I am able to serve others later. Maybe I need a nap, a brief moment of respite, or a snack.

I feel God with me in these moments as I care for myself (so that I may be able to care for others later) – I hope you do too.

*Dear God...Help us to be stewards of your love and always seek to help our neighbor. In times we may be “out of season” may you give us an extra push to love ourselves, so that we can put our kindest foot forward, even when we feel like we do not have the strength. Amen.*



**Broadening Our Sight and Opening Our Ears**

*“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.” Psalm 32: 1-4*

This Psalm describes the burdens of unconfessed sin – emotional, spiritual, even physical burdens. I’m born into sin, I live in sin, and I commit sins. And even though sin is are part of being human and so it’s something I can’t escape, the particular sins I commit are still mine. In all cases, I’m rebelling against God and what He would have me do. It’s so tempting to ignore my sins, or believe or pretend that they aren’t mine or aren’t as bad as those of others, or are outweighed by my “good” actions, words and thoughts. But even then, I’m sinning too – John 1:8 reminds: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” This Psalm shows the results: “groaning all day long” and “strength...sapped as in the heat of summer.” This is no way to live!

But the Psalm continues: “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin.” In the season of Lent, we head towards Jesus’s suffering, death, and resurrection, when he shows his power to take my sins and “cover” them, not “counting” them against me but forgiving my guilt. When I confess my sins, I can trust that they are forgiven before God and can stop trying to live with their burdens. No groaning, no sapping of strength. I can rest easy and live as God would have me. What a blessing and joy!

*God, thank you for your many blessings. Give me strength to confess my sins, even when I would rather not. Let me instead trust in the promise of your grace and forgiveness. Thank you for taking the burdens of my sins and letting me instead live freely. In your name I pray, Amen.*

February 18

Sunday

Mark 1:9-15

### **Welcome to the Wilderness!**

*“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:14-15*

Why did Jesus start preaching the gospel “after John was arrested”?

Context: 1:1 “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God...” – a controversial, subversive start, since “Son of God” was a title reserved for the Emperor Caesar, and the Galilean movement that sprung up around John could be suspected of treason. His call for “repentance” was heard by “everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem” (1:3) from priests to peasants to conscripted soldiers and tax collectors to King Herod, a Judean serving as the Emperor’s vassal.

John’s preaching had inspired hope in the people who suffered daily from Roman oppression. Revolution was in the air and the messenger was now in jail. Word about John’s arrest must have shaken that hope and triggered fear of retribution.

But John’s exit was the perfect cue for Jesus’ entrance into Galilee to proclaim the good news. Turn away (from the bad news of despair) and believe the good news: the reign of God is at hand! Fresh from his Spirit-driven 40-day walk-about in the wilderness, tested by Satan, sustained by the ministry of angels and the power of his newly envisioned calling, Jesus had the strength and courage to risk everything for the sake of the gospel of God.

In our Baptism, we too are named as beloved children of God, called and empowered to trust the Spirit to lead us into all truth – the good news of God for the whole creation, also beloved of God.

*Holy Spirit, free us and empower us to turn away from temptations to despair in our contemporary wilderness and proclaim the good news of God’s reign wherever the bad news threatens to prevail.*

February 19

Monday

Job 4:1-21

### **Good Counsel and God's Counsel**

*"But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged;  
it strikes you, and you are dismayed." Job 4:5*

When Job experiences hardships, his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, come to him to counsel him. When they see Job, they are so moved that they tear their robes and throw dust on their hair and clothes. They sit with him on the ground and do not speak for seven days.

Then, Eliphaz opens the colloquies with Job, offering his counsel. It seems like good advice! Eliphaz reminds Job how Job has instructed and supported others throughout his life, but now that he is troubled, he is discouraged and dismayed. He tells Job, "Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope;" meaning, your goodness should save you. Eliphaz also says he has seen, "Those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it."

Eliphaz believes the source of Job's troubles is guilt and sin. Eliphaz's perspective is how we humans want to understand the world and how we trick ourselves into thinking the world works.

God later corrects Job and his friends (Job 42:7-9). God has the power, and our human goodness and our sin are not determinative of our fortunes. But even as God rebukes the three friends, he sends them away to repent and make sacrifices. God shows God's power in God's mercy.

Job's story is our lesson to beware of the world's counsel and look to God's counsel.

*Dear God of power and might, keep us ever in your grace as we journey with you through life and to the cross. Amen.*

February 20

Tuesday

Job 5:8-27

**“But If I Were You...”**

*“But if I were you, I would appeal to God;  
I would lay my cause before him.” Job 8:5*

How many of us enjoy unsolicited advice that starts this way? I doubt many do. Job’s been through a lot, and he’s telling us what he’s learned, but it still comes across as a little preachy, even for the Bible.

This is another “upside-down” passage in the Bible. The lowly shall be raised up, the haughty shall be brought down. I suppose Job had been through a bit of both, so he can tell both sides of the story. And he doesn’t promise it will all be roses. You’ll still be “corrected.” You’ll still suffer “six calamities”-- even if God does rescue you from all of them. He will “wound” but also “heal”.

But through it all, the covenant is always present. The covenant tells you that your tent will be secure and that your children will be many.

“We have examined this, and it is true.  
So hear it and apply it to yourself.”

Thanks for the unsolicited advice, Job, but I’ll just keep making the same mistakes I always have!

### Strength for the Highs and Lows

*“Every word of God proves true;  
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.”* Proverbs 30:5

Immersing yourself into Lent can almost feel like binge-watching your favorite Netflix series. There are many highs and lows. Holy week is a microcosm of these emotions. From the celebratory high of Palm Sunday when Jesus is praised for his miracles and wise teachings, to the horror of Good Friday when he dies a criminal’s death, to the joy and wonder of Easter morn and the miracle of his resurrection. There are many highs and lows. And here we are at the beginning of Lent with a verse that begins with the words “I am weary Lord, but I can prevail”.

Personally, one of my favorite moments of Holy Week is the Maundy Thursday story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. The original servant leader, Jesus continually models for us all the key tenets of love, hope, dignity and mercy.

The joy of Easter is a joy grounded in the depth of knowing that God is with us: with us in the dark and quiet, with us in the unknown, and with us in the bright light of day. And through a humble act of service — washing another’s feet — we experience the healing power that comes with loving one another as God loves us.

Throughout Lent, as throughout our lives, the times of grief, hopelessness, and confusion might seem like the moments God is the farthest away. But when we listen closely, we can see signs that God is quietly present, sowing seeds, working wonders, and inviting us into growth and new life. As people of faith, we draw strength from this promise and strive to witness in its love and joy throughout all we do.

*Thank you, Lord, for the blessings of hope, love and mercy. Continue to empower us to share your gifts of faith and healing with the world.*

### Read the Fine Print

Many of us have read of God's covenant with Abram - "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." We are touched at the love God shows to Abram as he promises him that he will be the father of a great nation. What a reward to a man of great faith! Even though Abram and his wife Sarah had grown old together, they were never able to have children, so this promise surely seemed like an unbelievable blessing to Abram.

However, and we often find in the Bible there is a "however," God delivers some fine print in a dream, cautioning Abram that his descendants will have trials along the way to becoming a great nation. God told Abram, "For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward, they will come out with great possessions."

God makes us promises, God gives us gifts; however, that doesn't mean that there won't be challenges and work ahead for the promises to come to fruition. In our own lives, we can see this – someone might have enormous musical talent, but without training and practice, it will not be fully realized. Our best doctors and researchers spend years studying and working in laboratories to find cures for diseases, and still often unqualified naysayers will challenge their findings and publicly sow dangerous seeds of doubt.

What gift has God given you, and what are you doing to make full use of it? How will you meet the challenges along the way? Being blessed isn't a guarantee of an easy life—it is being equipped to do the work and meet the challenges to fulfill God's plan.

*Dear God, please guide and strengthen us as we work to develop the talents you have given us, and to meet the challenges we find along the way to use these gifts to your glory. Amen.*

February 23

Friday

Genesis 16:1-6

### **His Will, His Time**

*“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, ‘The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.’”* Genesis 16:1-2

“The waiting is the hardest part.” That’s what the poet said. Certainly, Sarai was singing that tune for the decades she and Abram spent waiting for the fulfillment of God’s covenant. Understandably, doubt and impatience contributed to Sarai’s reinterpretation of God’s promise that Abram would have an heir of his own flesh and blood.

Yet, unlike the other Old Testament narratives, when Sarai goes against God’s will there is no punishment. No fire from above, no salt pillars, no whale, just the birth of a child. Not a miraculous birth, and not one welcomed in the way Sarai first posited.

Sarai’s subsequent anger and jealousy lead to violence. Yet these acts, too, are not punished. God blesses all involved, culminating in Sarah’s conception and the birth of Isaac. It is an underrated message of unearned forgiveness.

Let us pray,  
*O Lord, please help us to remember that not our will, but Yours, on Your time, be done.*

February 24

Saturday

Genesis 16:7-15

### **Discerning God's Plan**

*"Return to your mistress and submit to her."* Genesis 16:8b

Sometimes it is difficult to discern God's plan or even believe that there is a plan. This whole chapter relates to direct commands from God, often through his Angel. Here the angel is speaking to Hagar, whose mistress was upset over the fact that Hagar was bearing Abram's child.

It seems strange that God relied on a somewhat complicated way of carrying out his plan. It is to involve even the changing of names. The child to be born, Ishmael, is to in turn father many generations. Along with the message to return, it is interesting that the angel warns of the type of man Ishmael is to become. Remember that Mary also receives messages about the difficult way for her son. One could play with the issue of predestination, but let's not.

One needs to look at the larger context of the covenant that God was extending to this couple and their descendants. One could digress on the denigration of women, who had no choice in their roles in God's plan, but again, let's not. I prefer to see this not as gender exploitation, but rather weaving women in as key players in God's plan.

How do we take this text and learn? We learn that one must listen for God's clues on how we fit into his plan. He invites us to participate, but often the specifics are not clear. There is an element of creativity here, which is not surprising when dealing with God the creator.

*Dear God, when we come to pray, let these be silent times when we do not ask but learn to listen for the way in which we are to be called. Amen.*



February 25

Sunday

Mark 8:31-38

## Denial

*“If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”* Mark 8:34b, NRSVue

Lent is the season of Denial. Our Roman cousins have a tradition of ‘giving something up for Lent’ – chocolate, television, and so on. That tradition has spread, and many Christians of all denominations follow it as well. More recently, there’s been a movement in the Lutheran church and others to ‘add something for Lent’ – a spiritual practice, volunteering, and more.

Me? Every year I trot out some variant of “I gave up giving up something for Lent for Lent”, or, if I’m feeling particularly cheeky, “I gave up the Pope.” Is it a cop-out? Absolutely... as I see it, that’s the true spirit of Lent, as we have come to know it. A season of copping out. A season of being in Denial. Of telling ourselves if we don’t eat this 3 Musketeers, we don’t have to pay attention to what companies get the rest of our grocery money. Of saying that as long as we volunteer a few hours at the shelter on Saturday, that we’re not responsible for the actions of our employers whom we give our forty plus hours from Monday to Friday.

That’s what Jesus meant, right? “For my sake, postpone diabetes and ladle out some soup, then be about your business?” That seems like a pretty good cross to bear! It’s what Jesus would do! The problem, Church, is Lent is not the season of “What Would Jesus Do?” – Lent is the season of “Who Would Jesus Be?” Were Christ to trade places with us for a week, would their day look the same as ours? Where we work, what we eat, whom we give our time and our treasures – can we see God doing the same?

Beloved, I tell you, Jesus would eat the 3 Musketeers. They’re objectively delicious, and being omniscient, Christ would know this. Don’t deny yourself the chocolate bar. Deny your self. Our world is on fire, the loving and inclusive Church is under fire, and our nation’s Constitution is one winter Tuesday away from being fired. Now is not the time for being in church on the weekend. Now is the time for being the Church every day.

*Lord, let Your Spirit be in and become me. Let this Lent be not a season in denial, but of denial. Show me how to deny my self, pick up my cross, and follow You to Golgotha and Gethsemane.*

### A Boy Brings Laughter

*“Now Sarah said, ‘God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.’”* Genesis 21:6

“KT, come sledding with me!” says the boy as we sit in the kitchen of my friends’—his grandparents’—house, as he pulls on his snow pants. I have a calm sip of coffee. I consider. I’m marginally prepared for the bone-chilling cold out there, and the snow, 7 inches and falling. On the other hand, it’s the first Snow Day in two years, and how often do I, a single septuagenarian, get such an invitation from an 8-year-old boy?

“Okay,” I say. “Give me a minute.” I finish another sip of coffee and pull on my tall boots and puffy black coat.

I’ve been pondering the story of Sarah and Abraham, two very very old people, also childless, who were long ago promised by God that Sarah would bear them a son. Abraham is now 100 years old, and Sarah is not much younger. Their long lives have brought many things, but no child.

And yet. And yet. “The Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.... Sarah said, ‘God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.’” The boy’s name in fact is Isaac, which means “he laughs.” We are left to ponder God’s amazing promises, fulfilled in God’s own time, surprising us with humor and joy.

This boy and I go outside to the slope that runs down toward the street. He gives me the green sled and takes the sleek one. We get on at the same time and begin to slide in tandem, faster, faster, laughing, laughing, until we fall together in a heap.

*Dear God, we give thanks for the gifts of children, of joy, of your kept promises.*

February 27

Tuesday

Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

### **Faith is...**

*“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* Hebrews 11:1

“The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living.” (Peterson: The Message)

No matter the translation, Hebrews 11:1 is the only message we need to ponder this Lenten season as we explore the meaning of our faith. The New English Bible says it this way: “And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see.”

Probably most familiar is the RSV version: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The writer of this letter (scholars are not sure who it was—perhaps Paul?) is reassuring the scattered followers of the God of Israel that their Creator has always been with them.

The writer takes care to go through the historical events of these people as they seek their “home”; going through these stories meticulously and reminding them (and us) that they are exiles and strangers on earth and asking them to remember what God has promised, and to hold on to the promises and continue in their faith.

This is not easy. Not for the Hebrews, not for us, not for humanity. Hope is still left in Pandora’s box, however, and we must trust in “the conviction of things not seen.”

*Heavenly Creator, strengthen our trust and certainty in your promises.*

February 28

Wednesday

Jeremiah 30:12-22

### **Restoration**

*“And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”* Jeremiah 30:22

Lost, wandering, alone  
I can find the path, just think hard enough, plan well enough  
There’s a way out, a way forward  
Where to go, what to do  
Grasping, but it slips away  
Seeking, but not finding  
Running all around and getting nowhere  
A pause, just a moment  
A message, so clear  
A rush of relief  
God is speaking, guiding  
I may not know where, but I’m on the right path  
Just listen, follow  
Relax, trust, and know that I am his

*Lord, continue to guide me, even though I do my best not to listen. Thank you for your love.*

February 29

Thursday

1 Peter 2:4-10

### Stumbling Stones

*“For it says in scripture, “Look, I lay in Zion a stone, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and whoever believes in him will never be put to shame.” So you who believe see his value, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stumbling-stone and a rock to trip over.” 1 Peter 2:6-8*

I am more accident prone than I'd like to admit to myself. I'm constantly banging into things, developing bruises from who knows where, and burning myself when I look at the stove wrong. I'd rather not have additional things to trip over, even if they are metaphorical stumbling stones.

When I was growing up, this verse was taught to us as a way to show how we were set apart from others who didn't understand God or The Word, and were destined to constantly stumble and trip through life. We never talked about how we as believers can get caught up in the arrogance of our belief and also stumble, or cause others to turn away from God because of our arrogance in our belief. Here, we are called to be confident, yet humble. We are called to proclaim the virtues of God, and invite others into the light with us.

*Dear Lord, may we understand when we become the stumbling-stone. May we use our understanding of you as the cornerstone to steady us as we build up others and support them on their way. May our work be built on your strength as we go through our lives. In Christ's name, Amen.*

March 1

Friday

Exodus 19:9b-15

### **Preparing to Encounter God**

*“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow.”* Exodus 19:10

How would you prepare to meet God? Honestly, this is not a question I’ve spent a lot of time pondering. As a life-long Lutheran and beneficiary of the New Testament, I’ve developed a more-casual-than-not understanding of what “being in relationship with God” means. I have taken for granted that, of course, I have direct access to God through prayer, faith, and good works, without stopping too long to ponder the question of what it means to be in the presence of God, or how I’d prepare myself for such an encounter.

This Old Testament passage, however, reminds us forcefully that encountering God – “Theophany” to use the theological term – is anything but a casual occurrence. It requires profoundly important preparation; indeed, one must be consecrated – made sacred – to experience God’s holiness. God goes to great lengths here to explain to Moses that a failure to prepare properly will result in painful death, so he had better get the people ready for it. And Moses does: “He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes.”

This stern formality and admonishment from God in the shadow of Mount Sinai to an exiled and frightened people that God is, truly, holy and thus requires supreme respectfulness and forbearance, rings a little discordantly in our modern ears. Yet, reading this passage reminds me just how much Jesus serves as the mediator between us and God – between me and God – and how much I take that for granted. It’s a powerful realization of how much Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection continuously prepares me and allows me to experience God’s presence in my own life.

*Lord, we give thanks for your holy presence in our lives. Remind us daily of the many ways that Jesus brings us closer to you.*

**Wanted and Welcome**

*“In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.” Psalm 19:4b-6*

The scope of Psalm 19 is vast. The psalm’s writer is talking about the sun, the sky, the whole earth. In comparison, I’m so small. I’m not the sun or the sky. Where do I fit in?

It’s a lonely sentiment, to feel small in the middle of a really big thing. And sometimes, being at church can feel like I’m one small person in the middle of a pretty big organization. Even though I’ve been at Reformation for six years, there are so many people on Sundays that I don’t recognize, and who don’t recognize me. There are ministries I don’t know about and sometimes when an event or volunteer opportunity is announced, I wonder, do they really mean me?

The answer is yes. In Scripture and in church, the answer is yes. I know this because one of the most well known stories from the gospels is about how God is mindful of us all, even the tiny sparrow, who is one of many. And I know this because when I’m on the other side, planning events for the young adult ministry, I’m so happy when people show up— new visitors, old friends, people who have been coming on Sundays and don’t quite know how to get involved. It makes me feel like I’ve done something right, like I’ve created something that people want to be part of.

I promise, whether you are new to the congregation or if you’ve been here for a while— you are wanted and welcome. Every church is a lot of small people coming together.

*God, help us overcome our anxieties. Help us be brave in putting ourselves out there, to show up to a new thing, and to encourage others to do so.*

March 3

Sunday

John 2:13-22

### **Sometimes You Need to Flip Over a Table**

*“In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!”*

John 2:14-16

Ok, I’ll admit, this was a tough passage to write on knowing that my daughter has been running around taking Girl Scout Cookie orders at church the last few weeks. But once I made my peace with that juxtaposition, I was able to see that what Jesus was doing was about much more than the simple act of getting commerce out of a house of worship. He was taking on an establishment that was debasing the temple – His Father’s house – and perhaps more than that, the merchants in the temple may have also been cheating worshippers. It reminded me of being a kid and seeing the times my Dad would get really mad about work: he found out someone he worked with was cheating a client or the company was trying to shortchange his people out of the compensation they deserved. I don’t think he ever actually flipped over a table, but I also know he didn’t just sit back and watch it happen – he looked out for his people, and he looked out for the clients.

It’s not always easy (sometimes fraught with peril, even) to stand up to injustice or corruption in our lives, and when it’s our time to take a stand, we can look to this passage in the Gospel for inspiration as we try to summon the nerve to do so.

*Lord, help us to see injustice and corruption around us and give us the courage to do something about it, even if it means flipping a table or two.*



March 4

Monday

Ecclesiastes 3:1-3

### **Embracing Life's Seasons**

*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."*  
Ecclesiastes 3:1

Life, in its essence, is a tapestry of seasons. Each season, be it of joy or challenge, is a thread that adds depth and color to our existence. As Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 reminds us, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted." These verses guide us to accept the ebb and flow of life's circumstances with grace and understanding.

In moments of prosperity, it's easy to feel gratitude and to see the hand of the Divine at work. Yet, in times of struggle, we often find ourselves questioning the purpose behind our trials. It is in these times that we must hold onto faith the most. For just as there is a time to weep, there is also a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

Let us take solace in knowing that each season serves a divine purpose, shaping us into the beings we are meant to become. May we learn to embrace the full spectrum of life's experiences, trusting that the Creator has a plan for every season we encounter.

*Heavenly Father, grant us the wisdom to recognize the purpose of each season in our lives. Help us to embrace both the joys and the challenges with a heart full of faith. May we grow in Your grace and continue to seek Your guidance in every season. Amen.*

March 5

Tuesday

Hebrews 9:23-28

### **An Anchor in Moments of Doubt**

*“So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” Hebrews 9:28*

Hebrews 9:23-28 is meaningful to me and is a reminder of the transformative nature of Christ's sacrifice in my own spiritual journey. The passage is a reflection on the once-for-all atonement, contrasting it with the repetitiveness of my own struggles and shortcomings. It underscores the mercy and grace extended through Christ's shed blood for my own forgiveness and redemption.

As I navigate the complexities of life, the imagery of Christ entering heaven with His own blood resonates as a tangible expression of God's love reaching into the depths of my own brokenness. This becomes an anchor in moments of doubt and a source of assurance in the face of my own imperfections.

The anticipation of Christ's return mentioned in verse 28 gives me hope. It reminds me that my faith is not in vain, and there is an ultimate reward awaiting those who believe. This hope shapes my perspective, influencing the way I approach the many challenges I face in my earthly life.

Hebrews 9:23-28, therefore, is not merely a theological concept but a living reality in my faith journey. It inspires gratitude for the unmerited gift of salvation, fosters humility in acknowledging my need for grace, and inspires a hopeful outlook anchored in the promise of Christ's return.

*Oh Heavenly Father, please help us face our problems and challenges with hope and courage and remind us of our short temporary life here on earth and our forever home with you. Amen.*

### Let My People Go

*“A scroll was found on which this was written: “A record. In the first year of his reign, King Cyrus issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and burnt offerings are brought....” Ezra 2b-3a*

It is often confusing to track the ancient rulers mentioned in the Old Testament. Some people confuse the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius for one another or think they are related, but they have their significant identities and were not related. Cyrus was a benevolent king who felt loyal subjects were entitled to keep their own culture and religion. He freed the Jews, allowing them to return to Jerusalem, and even provided instructions for the rebuilding of the temple. Darius comes later but respects the decrees of Cyrus.

Following local inquiries about the rebuilding that followed the freeing of the Jews, Darius refers to the archives for a review of what had been authorized. Documents were found, a relatively impressive fact in itself, detailing the generosity of King Cyrus. Of course, the rebuilding of the temple was no mean project, and the funding was to come from those seeking confirmation.

One also needs to consider the way the Jews saw the investiture of Cyrus as part of God’s plan for their cultural and religious restitution. Regardless of how one approaches the generosity of Cyrus, one has to be surprised that a conquering power could be so culturally sensitive, when often such powers destroyed anything not of their own.

This is more than historic text when one looks at Gaza today. How have things gotten out of hand when we have an historical example of generosity despite religious differences? Remember, Cyrus worshiped Zoroaster. Can decision makers use this text when starting to unravel the complexities in Gaza?

*Dear God, we pray that the decision-makers seeking peace in Gaza will have the willingness to step aside from their blindness of prejudice and hatred and see the love of God for all people. Amen.*

### A Change of Heart

*“And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.’”* Genesis 9:13-16

Oh, the wonder inspired by a rainbow! A spectacular reminder of the astounding miracle of creation, as the rainbow is created by the interaction of the two fundamental ingredients required for life: light (energy) and water (matter). Looking up at this magical display of the red-green-blue electromagnetic radiation spectrum, I am reminded of the deep shared connection between all living things on Earth. We contain within every cell the 3-billion-year-old memory of when ultraviolet radiation from the sky threatened to annihilate all life, long before the benevolent ozone layer protected us. Life is resourceful, resilient, and abundant.

I chose to interpret the flood story as a warning that human selfishness and hardness of heart is the most probable root cause for the extinction of our species. Indeed, God’s reason for sending the flood was due to the ‘wickedness’ of mankind. It is clear that any intelligent, self-aware species like ours would inevitably develop the technological capability to destroy itself, either through self-inflicted nuclear, biological, or environmental catastrophe. To pass through this trial, a fundamental change in the human heart is necessary. Jesus entered this modern world (2,000 years is but the blink of an eye) to provide one path for this change of heart. The radical notion of a crucified savior is introduced into the world. An absurd enough proposition to change a human heart, to live not just for oneself but also for others.

*Dear God, help me to understand and feel the vast connectedness of all creation, and to be inspired by your love.*

March 8

Friday

Daniel 12:5-13

### **Be Wise and Live Well**

*“And you, Daniel, be faithful to the end. Then you will die, but you will rise to receive your reward at the end of time.” Daniel 12:13*

The Angel tells Daniel that “a time of troubles” will last three and a half years, but when asked for more clarity, the Angel tells him the words would be kept hidden until the end comes, that the wicked will go on being wicked and only the wise will understand.

As a former history major, I have the benefit of knowing exactly when specific traumatic events ended: liberation of Auschwitz, the Civil Rights Act, or just how long Derek Chauvin’s sentence would be for murdering George Floyd. Reading primary sources or historical novels, I would send mantras from my omniscient perch, much like the Angel to Daniel: “just hang on a few months until May 1945,” “the famine will end,” “McCarthy will soon be disgraced,” or “the laws will change and you can marry your love.”

Daniel seeks a precise answer when suffering and troubles will end, which is understandable, as he and his people were currently enduring extreme hardship. This yearning to know how long trials will last plays out in tragically innumerable examples in today’s dark chaotic world: almost two years of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Israeli hostages still not freed, thousands (and climbing) of dead Palestinian civilians, more violence in Sudan, and concerns for our own democratic way of life. The precise timelines also resonated with the version of quarantined me (approximately 3.5 years ago), wondering how long the virus and attendant chaos would last and I could see my family again. Sometimes we have a rough patch and want to know when it will be over. Instead of certainty, the Angel reveals that the contours of the end will not be revealed until we have lived that full and wise life. I think this knowledge – to keep being true to yourself and doing what you know to be right and believing that the evils will cease – is the way to keep moving forward through uncertainty and despair.

*Dear Lord: please help me to be true to your teachings and wisdom, even through the darkest night when dawn seems so far. Help me to be wise and faithful and trust that you will make things right.*

March 9

Saturday

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

### A Cycle of Love

*“Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.”*  
Psalm 107:21-22

Imagine how this text lands on a child who was just denied dinner for some infraction of their caregiver’s law. Bad act, consequence, living with the rumblings in the tummy and then a reminder that God’s love endures – no matter what. This cycle is the same for us as adults. We know the rules, or think we do. Events occur and the consequences come down.

Recently, an elder got the full-light show of a traffic stop on the main street of her hometown of 147 people (embarrassing). She had not driven her vehicle in over a month, but needed to check her box at the post office. She had expired tags and was not wearing a seatbelt. Two offenses to our agreed-upon ways to live together (law). She received a warning. God’s love shone through the officer who had compassion in her situation. She was given an opportunity to drive the three blocks back to her home with a promise to take care of the tag issue, immediately. The consequence was minor; embarrassment and a delay of schedule. Ah, the joy and freedom in a form of forgiveness for erring. Then, there was a call to a friend. It became a celebration of the avoidance of fines.

The cycle goes on and on. There is pain, deliverance, and joy. We return again and again to knowing we are loved and treasured by our Heavenly Father, no matter what events and consequences occur in our daily lives.

The traffic stop is a simple story. You can put your own story in the template. Please know that when we fall away from God, we can repent and our Lord hears our call. We are forgiven. He resolves our problems. This is not always easy to see or in the moment, but time bears out this reality. Then, we call out in celebration of the power of our God, praising his name to all. {Review: Psalm 105, 106, and 107}

*Dear Lord, thank you for the love that sustains and builds us even when things are difficult. We know and feel your presence. Amen.*

March 10

Sunday

John 3:14-21

### **Being There for Others**

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16*

This is the central message of Christian faith and it stems from a nighttime conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, in which he is seeking to understand, but in the darkness of night he is left confused.

In Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus continues to engage, argue and persuade people who are slowly transformed into believers. Nicodemus later emerges from darkness into light (John 19:39) when he cares for Jesus’s crucified body.

John is telling us that there are contrasts between darkness and light and real consequences in our choices. In our daily life, we should look for these contrasts, look clearly at our lives, and recognize God’s gracious gift of love. God’s goal of bringing us to Him by illuminating our path through His Son, who was sent with the purpose of sharing everlasting life with us, is the way in which God loves the world. God is still speaking to us.

*Lord, during this Lenten Season, I pray that you will help me to see the contrasts, look clearly at my life, appreciate your gracious gift and trust in the confidence of God’s love for me. Amen.*

### The Tree of Life and a Faith Multiplied

*“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, and said, “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.” And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.” Exodus 15:22-27 (KJV)*

After the Hebrews fled the tyranny of Egypt, but before receiving the covenant, they wandered in the chaos of the desert and thirsted. They came upon water necessary for life but found it bitter until God placed in it a tree – a structure – and the waters became sweet. Elsewhere in the Bible, we see trees, and Christ’s people being grafted into the vine of Israel. Here, God saves the Hebrews from the tyranny of their own changing and untrustworthy impulses by planting his plan, his ordinance, his structure—his tree—in their chaotic waters. Then the waters become sweet and the true potential of life opens and multiplies, from one tree to forty-six palm trees, from one water to twelve wells for the twelve tribes of God’s people. When we root our lives in God’s ordinances, God’s tree of life, our faith and possibilities multiply, if we remember to pray that “thy will be done, thy Kingdom come...” and we “trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and lean not on your own understanding...” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

*Dear Lord, reconcile me to a love of your ordinances. Multiply my faith, and my service to your Kingdom. Protect me Lord, from the tyrannies of my own self-deceit, and bring me from the desert of my conceit into your service, and I pray – into the Promised Land. Amen, Amen, Amen.*



March 12

Tuesday

Numbers 20:1-13

### **The Big Rock**

*“Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank.”*

Numbers 20:11

I have to admit, my hesitation (and subsequent procrastination) in writing this reflection is because I do not have a recollection of studying this text. As any rational person would do, I made a deep dive through Google to try and get some understanding.

Many scholars work to explain a connection between the rock in Numbers and the rock in Exodus 17:1-3, 5-6. There are even some scholars who posit that the rock in Numbers and the rock in Exodus are the same. And others who posit that somehow the Israelites carried the rock with them as one event is in the wilderness of Sin and the other in the wilderness of Zin. Or it could be two different rocks. It's there where I got stuck. I couldn't focus on anything but the rock. Every time I tried to write something about the miracle of water from a rock or Moses's disobedience or the angry people who were tired from wandering for almost 40 years, I couldn't stop thinking about the rock.

At work, my team recently started using a new document to guide our check-ins with the folks we supervise. One of the sections in the check-in document is titled “Big Rocks,” meant to elicit a list of the challenges or difficult tasks that the supervisee must face in the coming week. So what is your big rock? I imagine that each of us are carrying a thought, feeling or burden that feels like a big rock. Maybe it's guilt about missing the deadline for finishing your part for From Ashes to Easter :) Or something bigger. An unresolved family situation. A debt that is too big to tackle. A scary medical condition. A feeling of loneliness. An unhealthy relationship.

So maybe as I worked through this, I got to the point...that no matter our burden, when there is no hope, when you feel like you are wandering the desert and that all is turned against you, God will walk with you and provide the water you need.

### **A Bright Future Alongside God**

*“Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations.”*

Isaiah 60:15

We begin with the prophet Isaiah’s proclamation on the future, a hopeful outlook of Israel and its people. He states God is aware of the Israelites’ suffering during their time as captives in Babylon, and if faithful, they would be rewarded with a glorious future. Nothing can stand in God’s way, even if the path may be tenuous. Haters of Israel will reverse course and honor its people, and those that do not will experience the wrath of judgment.

At this point in time, one could say the Israelites were at the bottom of a steep ravine. They needed Isaiah’s vision of redemption. Isaiah continued to recount the many things God would do if they re-established their faith, built on their relationship with God, and walked alongside God to salvation.

In the passage, we are reminded that God is the light that shines across the darkest depths of our minds and souls, providing us comfort from sin and sadness during the most unsettling times. She leads us out of our despair and into a bright future, full of hope and enlightenment.

At the close of the chapter, we read that when God acts, it has been predetermined and will happen quickly. Isaiah 60:22 - "The smallest one will become a thousand, and the least one a mighty nation. I, the LORD, will bring it about quickly in its time."

We need to be mindful and open to that change. No matter what we are facing, we must trust in God’s assurance that everything will fall into place at God’s perfect time.

*God, thank you for lifting us up from a state of despair and self-absorption. Rather than focusing on the darkness, help us to see the future with you as our guiding light. Keep us progressing forward whatever our current circumstances may be. Support us to engage in what you have set as our outcome with us by your side. In your name, we pray. Amen.*

March 14

Thursday

Psalm 51:1-12

***This Cleansing Needs No Soap***

*“Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”* Psalm 51:10-12

I remember singing this Psalm regularly as part of the offertory in the church service growing up, and as I got older it held more meaning to me and became my favorite part of the service. I can't help but hum the tune while reading it.

When researching for this exercise, I learned that this reading is a psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Can you relate? Have you ever messed up, been betrayed? Or been the betrayer?

Coming to worship and singing this Psalm, asking for God to create a pure heart and renew a right spirit in me, gave me a sense of renewal and opportunity for a fresh start for the week. This renewal is something I've come to rely on so often and reminds me of the grace that God shows us through his Son's death and resurrection, and so very thankful that I don't have to earn it. When I feel overwhelmed and falling short of my own expectations or others' demands, I know that I can find renewal and rejoice in this willing spirit that sustains me.

Praise be to God.

*God, thank you for helping wash us clean from our sins and offering renewal in your Word and promise.*

### Discipline

*"It is most holy to the LORD."* Exodus 30:10c

For so many of us, when we think of discipline we think of punishment. I invite you to review this passage of Exodus through the truthful lens of what discipline is, which is God's precise guidance that helps us become faithful and loving. How is this so? Here God proscribes and instructs in exact detail what the Israelites shall do to demonstrate their faith and love in God. In the simplest and most straightforward way, God instructs:

- 1) Who: The people of Israel as a congregation, and Aaron as the caretaker;
- 2) What: shall create an altar for fragrant incense;
- 3) When: for now, and for all times;
- 4) Where: placed in front of the veil of the temple;
- 5) How: with specific measurements (a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high) and materials (acacia wood, an aromatic wood with medicinal properties; pure gold); and
- 6) Why: to show how precious and sacred the prayers of the people (through the sight and smell of incense drifting through the temple) are to God.

Within these instructions are metaphors and sacred symbols, should you choose to look for them, but in its simplicity is loving guidance for instituting a ritual that begins again and again in the burning of incense in the morning and at twilight.

When I prepare the altar for communion, and decorate the church with sacred symbols, I am reminded that these are housekeeping disciplines established by God at the earliest written part of God's relationship with humankind. I recall God's faithfulness to me and to this liturgical tradition. I celebrate that I have this gentle hand of organization and boundary in the chaos of modern life. I am disciplined.

*Teacher God, bless us in our rituals that magnify your love and glory, now and forever. Amen.*

March 16

Saturday

Habakkuk 3:2-13

### God Defends Us

*“In fury you marched on the earth;  
in anger you trampled nations.  
You came forth to save your people,  
to save your anointed.  
You crushed the head of the wicked house,  
laying it bare from foundation to roof.”* Habakkuk 3:12-13

I'll be honest: I have a hard time with the Old Testament. I won't argue its importance, but every time I get into a particular passage, wrath and destruction crop up. It's tough to reconcile with the message of love in the New Testament. It seems that, before God finally sent Jesus to atone for our sins, he was just angry all the time.

The writing prompt reads, “Where do you see God moving in your assigned text?” He's stomping around, trampling nations and crushing heads! Presumably, these are the heads of the very people that you and I are commanded to love in Jesus's name.

So, let's put this passage in its context. I imagine people who have been attacked, who are oppressed, who are threatened by war or destruction at the hands of others, would feel great relief when mighty God comes to their aid. As God's people, we should trust that God will defend us and that justice will prevail in the end.

We should probably also leave all of the strong-arming to God, and stick to our calling of love. After all, in modern times, the wicked's house and God's anointed people are not always clearly distinguishable.

*Mighty God, help us to trust that you are strong enough to carry out your own justice. Guide us in our daily attempts to act with love. In your precious son's name we pray. Amen.*

March 17

Sunday

John 12:20-33

### **It's Time to Blossom!**

This reading is difficult knowing that the Cross is coming. We journey through the woman at the well, the Sermon on the Mount, turning water into wine, healing the nobleman's son, the miracle at the pool of Bethesda, the blind seeing, and Lazarus being raised from the dead – yet knowing that the cross is waiting for Christ. But yet look to Jesus: here he's resolved, sure, certain, and reassured by God the Father. Feel the power of Christ's resolution. God has sent the Savior, and the Savior is ready. How are we to be ready? By turning from the love of this life, focusing on the life to come, and serving Jesus. While our lives can be filled with doubt and questions, in the Gospel of John Jesus is steadfast. Jesus tells us that it is time for the seed of faith, even if a small as a mustard seed, must now blossom into the life God has planned. So, it is time to blossom. Look to the cross.

*Lord, keep my eyes on your plan for my life, and in this life, my eyes fixed on heaven. Allow the certain sacrifice of Jesus to comfort me in times of distress. Help me to blossom, Lord, into a servant fixed upon your word, with the hope of the Cross planted firmly in my heart. Amen, Amen, Amen.*

**Broadening Our Sight and Opening Our Ears**

*“Bring forth the people who are blind yet have eyes, who are deaf yet have ears!  
Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble.”*

Isaiah 43:8-10

When I was in high school, I was taught that God speaks through two texts, through the Bible and through the world all around us. This passage reminds me of the extra effort required for us to see and hear God in the wonders all around us. It reminds me of David Foster Wallace’s speech “This is Water,” where he urged graduates to consider the mundane, the people in line with us at the grocery store, people surrounding us in traffic, and the other things that we usually ignore. Just as easily as a goldfish might forget to think about water while swimming in it, it is easy for us to be blinded by careers, plans, and man-made divisions and to become blind to God’s work.

During the worst of the pandemic, I took a lot of walks. I gained a new appreciation for the birds in our community. From red-winged blackbirds to European starlings, from hawks and an owl in Lincoln Park, I believe each bird is a sign of God’s creation. Each bird reminds me that to see God’s reflection in everything around us it might require straining our necks or following faint notes of birdsong. I think that approach applies to people too.

*My prayer is that we push ourselves to broaden our sight to better see God’s work in our world. I pray that we trust in God ahead of our own priorities. I pray that we find ways to build bridges with other people that we may have otherwise ignored.*

March 19

Tuesday

Amos 2:10-12

### **A Living God Who Cares**

*"I brought you up out of the land of Egypt and led you forty years in the wilderness."* Amos 2:10

Did Amos speak as a champion of ethics? Was it in the name of the moral law that the shepherd of Tekoa left his sheep to proclaim his message in Samaria? Amos insisted that it was God whose call he followed and whose living word he carried.

There is a living God who cares. Justice is more than an idea or a norm. Justice is a divine concern. What pertains between God and His people is not only a covenant of mutual obligations, but also a relationship of mutual concern. The message of God is not an impersonal accusation, but the utterance of a Redeemer who is pained by the misdeeds, the thanklessness of those whom He has redeemed. His words are plaintive and disconsolate.

Heschel, *The Prophets*, Hendrickson Publishers, p. 32.

*Heavenly Father, forgive us our sins as forgive those who sin against us.*



### Rebuilding in Love

In the book of Haggai, one of the smallest prophetic books, the exiled Israelites have returned to rebuild Jerusalem, a once-glorious city now lying in ruin.

But the Israelites are struggling. Their crops are fallow, and they are far from enjoying the fine trappings of a bustling Jerusalem. Haggai believes that this is because they are selfishly focused only on their own homes, not on reconstructing the community beyond their front doors and certainly not on rebuilding God's temple.

Heeding Haggai's warning, the Israelites change tack and hone in on rebuilding the temple. But their efforts pale in comparison to the earlier temple built 500 years earlier. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" (Haggai 2:3)

But Haggai tells the people of Jerusalem that the temple's shabby walls belie its importance. God has grand plans for this small monument: It will be the center of God's coming kingdom, made "as a signet" and close to God (Haggai 2:23).

Haggai urges the people of Israel to double down on their work rebuilding the temple and, consequently, their community—despite roadblocks. "Be strong, all you people of the land," says the Lord, "and work; for I am with you," says the Lord of hosts," (Haggai 2:4). Beautiful architecture alone cannot assure a people's closeness with God; only their faith in Him can do that. God's presence can make the plainest building extravagant, but preparing for God isn't always easy.

Thankfully, Haggai is there to remind the people of Israel that God is cheering them on. Haggai's prophecy is a welcome reminder to me that when things go awry, I don't have to rebuild alone.

*Lord, we ask that you help us to see that our efforts to rebuild are not in vain. Remind us that you have plans to help us rebuild in love.*

March 21

Thursday

Deuteronomy 16:1-8

### **Celebration Rituals**

*“Observe the month of Abib by keeping the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night.”*  
Deuteronomy 16:1

During the pandemic, our family found new, Covid-safe ways to celebrate holidays. As pandemic conditions improved, I thought we would move past those Covid-safe activities, but realized my kids expected them to occur, even a year or two later. I was surprised how quickly they turned into ritual activities for them.

Celebration rituals are described in today’s text. The passage lists steps and actions to celebrate the Passover, and each is described with purpose and meaning. What activities become rituals to us? What rituals do we have during this season of Lent? What is important about maintaining those rituals?

*Creator God, help us to savor rituals and the meaning behind them.*

### Do Your Work With a Cheerful Heart

*“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” Philippians 2:12-13*

Starting about seven years of age, my brother and I got allowances. I cannot remember the going rate at the time, but we were expressly told, and reminded repeatedly, the allowance would be paid if we did our work with a cheerful heart. Yes, there were withholdings for squabbling or any other number of kid things. Plus, there were certainly times my allowance was provided even when I knew no cheer. All determinations about the receipt of our allowance were made in the context of day-to-day living with adjustments for the conditions.

This passage can best be understood with context, too. The beginning of Philippians 2 focuses on imitating Christ’s humility. Verse three says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility value others above yourselves.” The verse instructs us not to build up ourselves above others with power, wealth, or any other leveling device. In verse 12, the lessons in humble behavior expand to how we are handling our tasks (supervised or not). All of this explains how we are to be in relation to others while carrying out our life’s duties.

As our world becomes more and more filled with labor strife, workers are having to demand a living wage from corporations taking billions of dollars in profit. Where do we as Christians come down on these issues? What is our role to play? We want workers and want to be workers who do our tasks with integrity. We want people, who have power, to honor that work with comfortable living wages. These things in harmony fulfill His good purpose.

Let us move forward together working with a cheerful heart: recognizing and rewarding the roles that each one plays.

*Dear Lord, help us to look at how we treat others, valuing the role each one plays. Allow us to use our collective power, without self-interest, to support the common good for all.*

### Hope Within the Dark Days

*“Jeremiah, you say that this land is a desert without people or animals, **and for now, you are right.** The towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem are deserted, and people and animals are nowhere to be seen. But someday you will hear happy voices and the sounds of parties and wedding celebrations.”*

Jeremiah 33:10-11 CEV, emphasis mine

The world is heavy these days, as though even God cannot bear the weight of our collective burdens. Great communal sorrows - lynchings, pandemics, genocides, wars, climate change - stack up against smaller individual ones - chronic illness, long nights, job loss, broken relationships, infertility - and leave us all breathless as we struggle through each day. Perhaps it is comforting, then, to know that there is, as the author of Ecclesiastes so eloquently wrote, nothing new under the sun. Jeremiah wrote about the dark days that God’s people were experiencing centuries ago when he told God, “this land is a desert without people or animals.” And God affirmed this outlook by saying one of the most profoundly gracious statements included in the Bible: “for now, you are right.”

God doesn’t tell Jeremiah to quit whining, pull himself up by his bootstraps, drink more water, or invest in some serious self-care. He just acknowledges the truth of Jeremiah’s experience and feelings, acknowledges that yes, things are awful. That being said, God doesn’t allow Jeremiah to stay there. He gives him hope. Hope that someday, there will be happy voices again. Hope that God’s love never fails. Hope that there will be cause for celebration down the line.

It is here that we must choose to fix our eyes even as we remain in these dark days. We must join those in countless generations before us who have suffered in the same and in unique ways to recognize that for now, we are right: so many things are horribly wrong. But someday, we will hear true, unfettered joy in every voice.

*Lord all-powerful, thank you for your willingness to wait with us in the desert. May we work each moment with you toward the someday you promised to Jeremiah, to St. Julian of Norwich who believed all will be well, and to all those who have called and will call upon you from the beginning of time until the end. Amen.*

March 24

Palm Sunday

Mark 11:1-11

### **Hey, Sanna, Ho Sanna, Sanna Sanna Ho**

*“The people who were in front and those who followed behind began to shout, Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the coming kingdom of King David, our father! Praise be to God!”*

Mark 11:9-10

I can't read this without hearing the lyrics from the 1973 movie version of Jesus Christ Super Star as Jesus was entering Jerusalem. The crowds were exuberant singing “Hosanna,” which expresses adoration, praise, or joy. The movie seemed so human, complete with doubts, fear, and rivalries. I have trouble relating to Bible stories usually, but this version made the story seem real. The emotions are splendidly portrayed. My version of worship is quieter. I have learned through contemplative practices that there is a divine presence within me. I know God is with me in the quiet. I feel gentle shimmering indicating pathways to take. But alas, sometimes I get so rattled, and there is so much noise, I forget to listen. When I am quiet...

The veil lifts,  
Spirit is here!  
Anything can happen!  
Call it magic, full of wonder!  
Beliefs waver, sit in silence,  
The silent nudge comes,  
Glories of light ignite,  
Catch the glimmers,  
Sit in awe.  
Feel heart swell,  
A smile serenely moves across,  
Peace comes.

*Oh, holy One let my hand be in yours. Let my heart be in yours. Keep my mind at peace. Even as I sing Hosanna. In Your Holy name, Amen.*

March 25

Monday

Isaiah 42:1-9

### **The Way, The Truth, and the Life**

*“In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. [...] I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”* Isaiah 42: 4, 6-7

I love these verses. I get a warm, fuzzy feeling when I read them. That’s a cliché, but it’s true, as clichés often are. These verses speak to the power of living a Christ-like existence. When we walk with God, we need not scream and shout or throw things to make a change. It is by and through our faith that we will bring about new things.

*Oh God, thank you for sending us your son and humble servant, Jesus, to be a beacon of light and hope to the world. Help us to keep Jesus’ example of humility and faithfulness in our hearts and on our minds, always.*

### **The Work and the Reward**

*“In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me...”* Psalm 71:1–3a

What really reaches out to me from this portion of Psalm 71 is the relief and joy and reassurance that is the promise of pursuing righteousness. The Psalmist speaks from rich human experience when he talks of the power of goodness to protect us from shame. Having confidence in our own mindful pursuit of God’s goodness can help us to endure others’ attempts to demean or diminish our thoughtful and intentional acts.

Doing good in our world is wearying work. It lightens the load knowing that we are earnestly striving for goodness, following the path of wisdom, and can encourage and embolden others to do the same and shoulder the burden together. Refocusing on our own pursuit of righteousness can help us to see with perspective and therefore protect us from the grief of feeling like too many bad people are winning too much of the time. Doing good can be a challenge, but it can also be an overwhelming relief.

*Dear Lord, as I work to lessen suffering, exploitation, and domination and increase justice, fairness, and compassion, help me to rejoice and take refuge in that commission.*

March 27

Wednesday

Hebrews 12:1-3

### **Ultimate Endurance**

*“And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Hebrews 12:1b*

This text does provide the ultimate example of endurance: Jesus focusing on his faith, rather than his fate. But, Jesus was able to overcome his fate only because of the “joy of knowing you would be his”. Hidden within this text is a tremendous call to community. The suffering of Jesus and his sacrifice connects us, not only as a community of believers, but also serves as a mandate to do the hard work to create a world full of joy, love, and justice.

*Let me connect and live in fragments no longer.*



March 28

Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

### **“Do As I Have Done for You”**

*“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up ... and began to wash his disciples’ feet.” John 13:3-5*

Maundy Thursday signifies the last stages of Jesus’ journey to the cross. That journey began with his baptism: “A voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’” Thence followed his trial in the wilderness: “‘IF you are the Son of God,’ [the devil] said, ‘throw yourself down.’” At the end of his journey to the cross, the mob repeats this satanic refrain: “Come down from the cross, IF you are the Son of God!” But in both instances, Jesus rebuffs the temptation to prove or question his identity conferred by the Father’s baptismal blessing. He remained on the cross, bleeding under a crown of thorns.

The day prior Jesus faced a similar test, this time from his closest friends. Though “he had come from God,” Jesus assumes the station of a menial servant and chooses to scrub his disciples’ cheesy toes. “You shall never wash my feet!” Peter exclaims with typical dramatic flair. Jesus could have acquiesced, craving to underscore his position as Teacher and Lord rather than humiliate himself thus. But in his journey to the cross, Jesus resists the temptation to defend his rightful identity. He replies: “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

*Lord, remind me of my identity as a child of God whenever doubts arise, so I need not seek to prove my worth to others. Thus free me to wash the feet of others with the same radical Love you bestowed upon the world.*

**My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?**

*"...Generations shall proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it." Psalm 22:31*

One day when I was about 9, my mother found me sobbing in desolation. I don't remember why. She told me to stop crying. There would be bigger things to cry about later in life. Even then I recognized that my mother was mistaken. Grief was grief, and I was in the throes of it.

The opening lines of Psalm 22 depict true grief. We have, most of us, been there at some point. Nothing can be more painful than betrayal by people we count on, maybe even God. That is the bottomless, the unimaginable grief Christ was suffering on the cross. But wait. There is something else about grief. People in recovery recognize that in order to begin healing, we need to get to a point where we are able to turn our lives over to the power of God - or "higher power." To "hit bottom." When we let go, we can begin to experience God's healing presence. God is with us.

In Jesus' day the Psalms were not numbered. They were known by their first lines. "The Lord is my Shepherd." "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills." So, what was Jesus doing up there on the cross? Suffering, yes, truly, agonizingly, suffering. He was also naming a psalm. A psalm his disciples would have immediately recognized. It was Jesus' message to them. The psalm's turning point is at verse 19: "But you, O Lord!"

But you, O Lord, have the victory. You are with us. We will be – we have indeed already been rescued. The poor shall eat and be satisfied. Future generations will proclaim God's deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that the Lord has done it.

If we understand and experience that God has been with us in our joys and our deepest sorrows throughout our lives, how can we imagine that that same God would abandon us at the gate? That is Jesus' message to us.

*Heavenly Father, you have sent your Son, Emmanuel, to be with us forever. Accept our praise and thanksgiving for your constant presence.*

March 30

Easter Vigil

Daniel 3:1-29

**Seek the Lord Above All Things and God Will Hold You in  
God's Care**

*"If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up." Daniel 3:17-18*

Who beckons me? What Loving Source is above?  
I reach high for you Transcendent God  
but your beauty is too high for me.  
From the tallest mount, I long to unite with the maker of the stars.  
But the snares of life drag me down and I am lost below.  
My schemes hold me back from beholding Perfect Good.  
Yet Living-Loving Energy still invites me, "Come."

Who beckons me? What Immanent Love is near?  
God's spirit shines bright but veiled like the sun behind clouds.  
My senses are too dull to penetrate such holy mystery.  
I reach for you with blind hands to grasp your perfect love  
but cling instead to worldly ways.  
"I am all around you, very near. Follow me."

Who beckons me? What Abba-Love is here?  
Beloved Lord, I sought your presence near and far.  
My action was uttermost; I could not comprehend your open  
hand.  
Nervous sheep cannot find the pasture  
if they do not follow the shepherd.  
Mighty Lord you are everywhere in your universe.  
I have found no place where you are not.  
But now, here, you hold me close.  
"I made you in my image. I am within you.  
Stay with me and be comforted."

*Abba Father, let me know you more and more. Keep me close to you. Amen.*

### Hope Springs Eternal

So much has happened to get Jesus down the road to Calvary. And now it seems to be over, in many senses of that word. Over. Jesus, so bright, is dead. We walk alongside Mary the mother of James, Mary Magdalene, and Salome as they do what is usually done in those kinds of circumstances.

When people died during that time, it was customary to anoint them for burial. Since Jesus had died on the Sabbath, however, preparations were delayed until the next week. As they walked, there were all types of questions and feelings lingering, all encapsulated in “who will roll the stone away for us?” If they needed the stone rolled away, by this time, they fully believed that he was in there. Finality was setting in. Hopes were dashed. Chapters closed forever—brilliant, yes—but all too brief.

As they continued to walk, we can see a series of surprises taking place in real-time. First off, the stone was rolled away. Second, there was a man inside, but not the right man. Third, the man whom they were seeking was not present. He had arisen!

The resurrection brought back Jesus from the grave in a way that changed the world forever. Through this act of God, we are called, claimed, and redeemed! Hallelujah!

That’s the big act. But there are a series of little ones, too. The resurrection also revived the hope that had been brutally snuffed out in the hearts of these first believers. This reality grounds our hope today. When we get past the point of all possibility, and we have our own questions of “who will roll away the stone,” signifying the resolve to close chapters and shutter the doors and windows of hope, we remember the God that has claimed us. One who not only resurrected the body of God’s Son, but also, in doing so, brought hope back, too. Jesus is Risen, and so, it appears, has Hope.

Don’t shut that door forever just yet. God is still working in, through, with, and for us.

So. Here’s to hoping.

## ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

February 14 ALBERT SWINGLE, a member of the Reformation community of faith, is a retired pastor who lives on Capitol Hill with his wife, Nancy.

February 15 JUDITH MANGUBAT has spent her entire career working for federal agencies and community organizations.

February 16 KIRI NICHOLSON lives in Arlington, Virginia with her tripod (3-legged) cat, Tillie. Outside of Reformation she enjoys knitting, baking, running and yoga.

February 17 MATT COOK is an attorney at the Securities and Exchange Commission. He has attended Reformation since 2005 and serves as an usher and on the Stream Team. He and his partner, Patrick, live in Adams Morgan.

February 18 TED STEEGE is a former pastor, public policy advocate, and voracious reader who loves seeking collaboration in the ongoing quest for knowledge in this beautiful and imperiled world, where God is not through with us yet. His top priority is caring for Eva, who keeps him alive with her fountain of joy.

February 19 IVY FINKENSTADT is a long-time Reformation member. This is her third year editing From Ashes to Easter. It is a joy.

February 20 EVAN BENOIT has been a member of Reformation since 2011 and sings bass in the Children's Choir.

February 21 ALESIA FRERICHS and her husband Stephen are longtime members of the Reformation. Alesia currently serves as the President and CEO of Lutheran Services in America – a network of over 300 social ministry organizations founded in the Lutheran faith tradition of service in community. Let her know if you want to learn more about faith in action!

February 22 DIANE KOHN has been a member of Reformation since 2001. She has served on the Council and sings in the choir. Diane is a Foreign Service Officer who has served in Nigeria, Lithuania, Romania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She is now preparing for her next assignment in Ukraine. In her free

time, Diane reads incessantly, crochets scarves for the knitting circle, and still finds it necessary to explain the rules of hockey to referees at Caps games.

February 23 EVAN SCHRAGE is the Vice President of the Church of the Reformation Council. He has been a member of Reformation since 2019. Originally from Arizona, he now lives in the NoMa neighborhood in northeast Washington, D.C.

February 24 PHILIP W. MOELLER, PhD., the son of a Lutheran Pastor, graduated from St. Olaf College and has a MA and PhD in International Relations and Development. He has specialized in institutional dynamics as a key to sustainable development, addressing governance, public ownership, ethics, social and environmental impact, and inclusivity for the State Department, USAID, UNDP, the Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank.

February 25 JARROD JABRE is *still* stoked to be your Director of Operations.

February 26 KATHRYN TOBIAS, a Reformation member since 1977, loves writing, assisting refugees through Good Neighbors of Capitol Hill, leading the Metro DC ELCA Global Mission Committee, singing with the Reformation choir and Arioso, traveling, and gathering with family and friends in nearby Cheverly and beyond.

February 27 HELEN STAUDERMAN, a member of Reformation and recently a citizen of the District of Columbia, moved to The Villages At Rockville, MD, in November 2023. She is Sarah Stauderman's mom.

February 28 MATT AVILES lives in Capitol Hill and has been attending Reformation since 2017, where he is involved with the Youth Group and the Finance Committee. Matt is a huge sports fan, particularly of Duke basketball, the Caps, and whatever soccer match is on at the time. He loves to explore new parts of the city, so if you have any good tips, send them his way.

February 29 GLORIA KENYON has been a member of Reformation for many years and always enjoys writing her FATE entry. She is wife to Greg and mom to Ben. She enjoys romance novels and baking.

March 1        CRAIG MIDDLEBROOK has been a member of Reformation since 1990. He currently serves on the Church Council and is a member of the Reformation “Fix-it Group.” Both of his children, Ella (20) and Henry (24), were baptized and confirmed at Reformation. He lives in Falls Church, Virginia, with his wife, Stacey Helberg.

March 2        MOLLY HIGGINS joined Reformation six years ago and is part of the Wednesday Night Bible Study and young adult ministry. Outside of church she is a librarian with the USDA. She spends her free time cooking and swimming.

March 3        MATT FUEHRMEYER has been a member of Reformation since 2010. He lives in Silver Spring with his wife, Liz Baden, and their children, Hannah (7) and Andrew (4). You can find them in “chaos corner” in the back of the sanctuary during the 11 o’clock service, and if they’re not in the Parish Hall during coffee hour, at least some of them are probably in the nursery making a ruckus.

March 4        EMMANUEL KABASAALA was born in Uganda and learned of Christianity at a young age from one of the elderly women in his native village. He testifies that his faith has been key to his survival.

March 5        DELWYN (DEL) VOSS is a long-time member of Reformation. He met his wife Chari met at Reformation at a Lenten service and dinner. Delwyn works for a publisher of government information called Federal Information & News Dispatch. For fun, Delwyn is a beekeeper.

March 6        PHILIP MOELLER has served on the Board of the Global Mission Division of the ELCA, and in 2017 was awarded a bronze medal for 50 years of International Service by Johns Hopkins University. He served on the Board of ReconcilingWorks as Director of International Programs. He chairs the Worship, Music and Arts Committee at Reformation. He also chairs the Metro DC Synod Reconciling in Christ team.

March 7        PETER HEIM is a long-time Reformation member and lives with his wife Laurie on Capitol Hill. Their sons, David and Nick, grew up in the church. Peter makes semiconductor lasers for a living and enjoys singing in the choir.

March 8        DINA FINKEL joined Reformation in 2018 and can be seen walking her fluffy dog Fitz throughout Capitol Hill East. When she's not lawyering, she enjoys traveling, spending time with friends, eating, or haunting the library and local bookstores.

March 9        CANDACE LILYQUIST is a cradle Lutheran and future member of the church. She is an Organizational Specialist with the National Education Association. This work includes organizing, leadership development, grant administration, and organization development.

March 10       JULIE HASLER is a long-time member of Reformation (since about 1990), who previously served on the Council as recently as 2020. She has been working in D.C. since 1989 and currently works in government affairs for a medical device manufacturing company based in Indiana. Julie is an active member of the Capitol Hill Tennis Club and resides in Arlington, VA. She enjoys being an aunt to 17 nieces and nephews and a great niece!

March 11       JAMES PAYNE is the husband of Jessica Snowden and father of Charlie Payne. He is a teacher, under 12s basketball coach, and a sinner.

March 12       REBECCA LINDHURST has been a member of Reformation for over 20 years. Her current attendance includes her daughters Kaiya and Loisa, and her partner Kip. Before kids, she could be seen chairing the board of Southeast Ministries and hosting coffee hour on a regular basis. Lately, it seems like it takes all we have to get the girls to Sunday school and make it to church on time. By day, Rebecca works at Bread for the City, a DC non-profit that provides food, clothing, medical, legal and social services.

March 13       KIRSTEN PETREE joined Lutheran Church of the Reformation in 2005, with her husband Corey and daughter Ella. She is part of the Stream Team and enjoys walking (and wine) with the newly launched Empty Nesters club. Kirsten works for NASA Science as Executive Officer/Chief of Staff.



March 14 KAYT WAHLERT, a native Iowan, has been coming to Reformation since the early 2000s and has served in various roles including serving on Council, coordinating ushers, and helping with Confirmation. Now she can be found trying to keep up with Hank (3) and Winnie (1.5). She and her husband, Joe Smith, reside in Alexandria and are thankful for the Reformation faith community.

March 15 SARAH STAUDERMAN leads the Altar Guild and is an enthusiast for the art and architecture of Reformation church. She works at the National Archives in the Preservation Programs department.

March 16 CAITLIN JACOBS has been a member of Reformation for about 18 years. A choir member on hiatus, she likes to sing the alto line from the pew. She lives in Wheaton with her husband, Paul, her daughter, Clíodhna, and their cat, Molly.

March 17 JESSICA SNOWDEN is the Reformation Sunday School Superintendant, a frequent Fellowship Hour host, mom of Charlie Payne, wife of James Payne, and former president of the Council during the 2022 interim year.

March 18 SHIVA SETHI has been attending Reformation for around a year. He is in his final semester of law school and plans to go into union-side labor law after graduation. His partner is Marcia Brown, who sings in the choir.

March 19 ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL (1907-1972) was perhaps the most important Jewish theologian in the twentieth century.

March 20 MARCIA BROWN has been attending Reformation since early 2023 with her partner Shiva Sethi. She sings soprano in the choir and is a journalist covering food and agriculture.

March 21 BEKKA MEYERS lives in DC, works in grant management, and is a member of Reformation, along with her husband and two children.

March 22      CANDACE LILYQUIST grew up on the lake in Northern Minnesota. She attended Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Hospitality and special events including parties are her way of serving the church community. In her spare time she camps, observes birds, bakes, and reads. The Book Club and Games Group are on her agenda for 2024.

March 23      BETHANY RUTH JABRE loves people and their stories, would do best with eighteen hours of sleep a day, and has a pair of Converse and a third harmony part for every occasion. She lives in Silver Spring with her husband Jarrod (Reformation's Director of Operations) and their son.

March 24      LIZ TUCKERMANTY has been a member of Reformation since 1980. She is a member of the Altar Guild, the small community group "The Hush Puppies," and the knitting group. She itches to join ping pong, but it appears they all meet at the same time. She is a choir groupie on trips because her husband, Dale Manty, is in Choir, and their house is frequently refugee-resettlement central.

March 25      EVAN SCHRAGE is the Vice President of the Church of the Reformation Council. He has been a member of Reformation since 2019. Originally from Arizona, he now lives in the NoMa neighborhood in northeast Washington, D.C.

March 26      EVAN CHRISTOPHER joined Reformation in 2021. He enjoys volunteering at Reformation as a reader, handyman, baker, and member of the choir. Originally from Oregon, he has lived in northwest Washington, D.C. since 2021 with his wife, Kate, and their dog, Tito.

March 27      KIM BENOIT has been a member of Reformation since 2010. She likes outer space, her church-mom friends, and a good Fellowship Hour spread.

March 28      PETER POON and his husband Marcos Dacruz have been members of Reformation since 2021, and live in the DC neighborhood of Brookland, NE. When not toiling away at the US Department of Veterans Affairs, Peter enjoys reading, traveling, collecting and listening to vinyl records of all genres, baking,

hanging with friends and family, and otherwise engaging in intellectual, spiritual, cultural, and creative pursuits.

March 29      EVA STEEGE was born and raised in Duluth, Minnesota. She worked for three years in the late 90s as Reformation's Parish Administrator. She then enrolled in the seminary at Gettysburg, and subsequently served congregations in the New England and DC Synods. Now happily retired, she and her amazing husband, Ted Steege, live in College Park, MD.

March 30      JULIETTE JONES is a writer. She and her husband Marvin have been active at Reformation since 1987, where their four children were baptized. They are delighted with the new growth and more fun in the church.

March 31      PASTOR KEVIN VANDIVER is the Senior Pastor at LCOR.

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