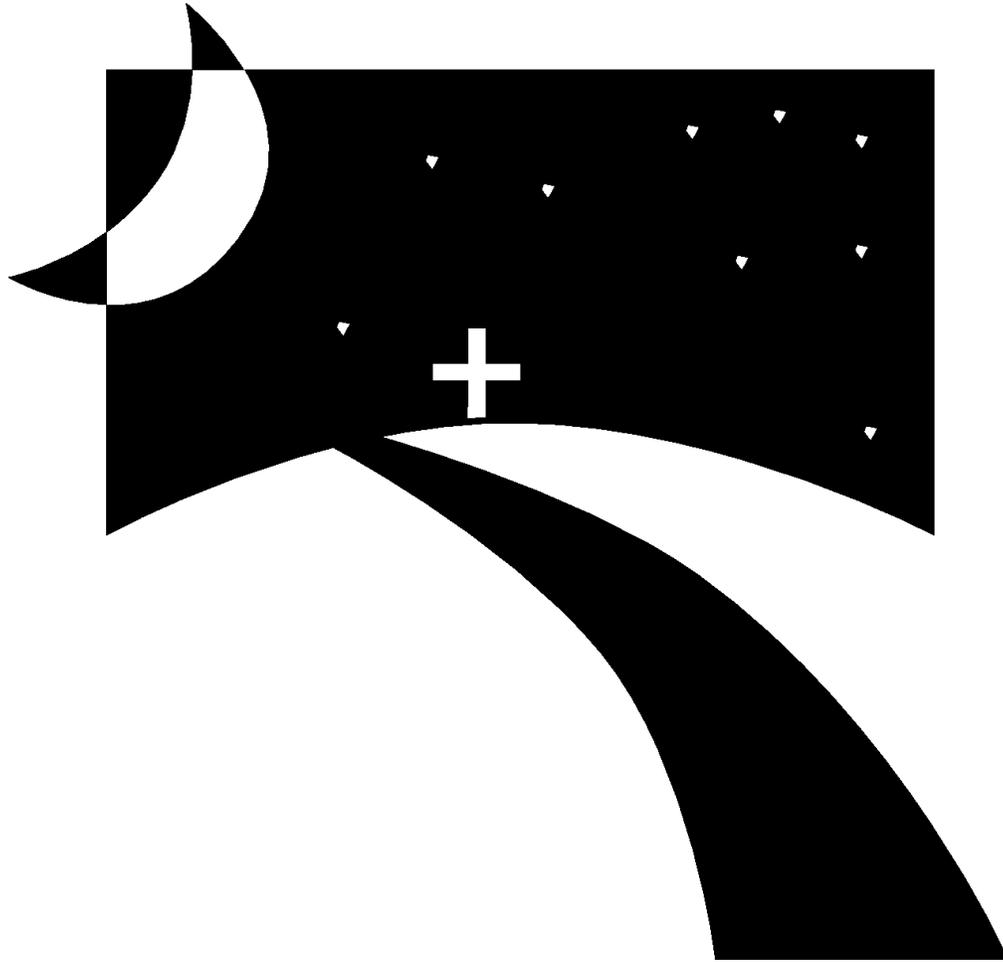


From Ashes to Easter



Lutheran Church of the Reformation

Lent 2022

From Ashes to Easter

The Meditations of our Hearts

By Members & Friends of this Community

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE REFORMATION

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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

Ash Wednesday

March 2

8:00 a.m. & 7:00 p.m.

Mid-Week Lenten Services

Wednesdays, March 9, 16, 23, 30, & April 6

Soup Supper - 6:15 p.m.

Service & Study on the
Book of Jonah - 7:00 p.m.

Holy Week Services

Maundy Thursday, April 14 - 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, April 15 - 7:00 p.m.

Easter Morning

April 17 - 8:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

We give thanks for all of the saints who have journeyed before us and all those who have crafted this annual devotion throughout its 30+ years.

FROM OUR COUNCIL PRESIDENT

I can't wait for you to turn the pages of this Lenten Devotional. For all of our interactions, we don't always speak about our faith even to each other at Church. For some of us, we've been actively taught not to discuss our faith (don't talk about politics, religion, or money was something I remember my mother teaching me...I've even remember hearing that religion was a forbidden topic at Al Capone's speakeasy, along with politics and upcoming heists). It's also very vulnerable and for some, uncomfortable. For some of us, we expend energy throughout the week consciously or subconsciously avoiding talking about our faith. For most of my life, I didn't even know how to even begin talking about my faith. That's why I love this devotional. I love being assigned the task of reflecting and of opening up about religion and faith. I love sharing it and receiving it from you all. And because I trust my church family, I was able to approach this task with a tender, but confident heart. Maybe what I write, what I share, what I say, and how I say it are a little messy. We love each other anyways. As you read, maybe you'll learn something about the scripture or maybe you just learn something about the person writing the devotion. And our love for each other grows. Maybe you relate to the reflection and feel seen by what you've read. And we are reminded why we love each other.

My hope for our congregation is that we read these personal reflections and experience love – love for one another, for God, and His love for us.

Thank you for letting me love and serve with you. I'll sign off with my Sunday School blessing because I've got myself feeling all sentimental. Until I see you next, God Bless your Brave Hearts and Beautiful Faces.

With Love,
Jessica Snowden

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.

March 2

Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Jesus, My Teacher

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. . . . But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen.” Matthew 6:16-18

When I read Matthew 6, I imagine Jesus teaching with his disciples and closest pupils seated around him in a circle. This chapter reads like a course outline—flowing fluidly and succinctly from how to give to the poor, how to pray, how to fast, to what will be rewarded on heaven and on Earth. Sometimes, I would like to raise my hand. “Rabbi, how do we fast in private?” “Shouldn’t my devotion be a lesson to others?”

“Shouldn’t my self-deprivation be acknowledged and congratulated?” “Will there be extra credit for the gifts of charity I give?” “Can this be a group project?” I have a lot of questions for Jesus about how to live in a world where presenting one’s best life outwardly still seems to matter so much. Am I okay, the way I am living, Jesus?

On Ash Wednesday, we come to Jesus and admit we are not the versions of ourselves we portray to the world. God knows my sin and loves me anyway.

Jesus had a short time to teach his disciples. He has our lifetimes to teach us. I want to dig deeply into prayer and fasting practices this Lent. I hope to be touched by Jesus’ lessons of compassion and feel the forgiveness and reconciliation of Jesus’ words.

Dear Jesus, make me open to the deeper meaning of your teachings this Lent. Help me to live in a manner pleasing to you. Amen.

March 3

Thursday

Exodus 5:10-23

Be Angry

“Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, “O Lord, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people.” Exodus 5:22-23

Today we’re going to sit with pain and frustration. We’re going to lean into anger with God. During Lent we often tell ourselves and others to find hope in dark times, that God loves us and he’ll bless us. We just need to be patient and have faith. I’m not saying those things aren’t true, but not all dark times are as short or as certain as the forty days of Lent. Often, we don’t know how or when our darkness will end. What do we do while we’re going through those times? God would bring the Israelites out of slavery and into the promised land, but first they would have to endure decades of hardship and wandering in the desert. Blessings came, but it was not quick or easy.

It is easy to look at the Israelites as whiners and complainers. We wonder why they questioned God. Be honest, would you have responded any differently? The Israelites followed God. That’s all that matters. They may have grumbled, they may have cursed God, but they followed. And here’s the secret: God can take our whining, he can take our curses. I would argue he wants them. God wants a relationship with us. That means we shouldn’t just come to him asking him to magically fix our situation. We should also come to him with our struggles. We should tell him when we’re angry or sad or in pain and work through it with him. God can take it and he wants to because he loves us. So be angry with God, but be with God.

Lord, remind us that it’s okay to be angry with our situation and with you. Sit with us in our pain. Strengthen us when it’s too much. Carry us when we fall. Remind us of your love.

March 4

Friday

Exodus 6:1-13

Did You Hear? Or Are You Too Tired?

"I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." Exodus 6:7

God says the quote above to the Israelites via Moses and... They don't listen. They are too worn down from their enslavement to have the capacity to believe the promise being made. And yet, God delivers and leads them to freedom. It doesn't take much to reflect on life since March 2020 and identify times where we have been so worn down that the promise of God falls on deaf ears. However, despite our inability to hear, God still delivers. And will continue to do so.

Dear Lord, please give me the strength to listen to your promises and forgive me when I fall short. Amen.

March 5

Saturday

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For Everything a Season

*“There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:”* Ecclesiastes 3:1

Everything that happens on earth has an appointed time, such that things inevitably happen, and in an orderly and preordained manner. All things have a beginning and an ending, and there is a preordained order to the universe. For example, “a time to be born and a time to die” – there’s a time when you’re born. That’s a time of joy. A time of newness. Of beginnings. There’s hope. And like there’s a time for birth, there is also a time for death. It happens to all. It is an inevitability.

Nothing is an accident. And every season will come to an end.

As someone who struggles with anxiety, I take comfort in the notion that when I’m going through a difficult time, I can trust that “this too shall pass.” Conversely, I try to remember to live in the moment - or “season” of life that I’m in.

My current “season” of life is as a mother to two young children - Olivia, age 4.5, and Vinh, a newborn. This season has many challenges (sleep deprivation being the primary one) but many, many moments that I treasure - preschooler silliness and newborn snuggles, family dinners, and trips to the park. I try to enjoy as many moments in this season as possible, because one day, this season will end. And another will begin. There is comfort in knowing that the season I’m in is part of God’s plan, and when it ends, that is part of God’s plan too.

Thank You, Father, that You know the end from the beginning and that everything under heaven is within Your authority. Thank You, that You are in control of all that is happening in my own individual life and the wider world in general. May I trust You through all the circumstances of life and as I seek. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

March 6

Sunday

Luke 4:1-13

Getting Ready Instead of Giving Up

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.”

Luke 4:1-2

And just like that, Lent has begun. Traditionally, this means forty days (plus Sundays) of giving up something, fighting temptation, and hopefully coming out victoriously, like Jesus did. Over the years, I have tried to give up drinking alcohol, swearing at other drivers, checking social media, and various other things. Breaking those habits certainly was hard, and I felt good having done it, but am I really resisting evil by doing it? Probably not. But if not, what is the point? So, for a while, I decided not to have a Lenten practice, and as I write this, I am not sure I will have one this year. Perhaps I will get ready instead for a time, be it four days or forty or however long, when I really should resist evil and temptation in whatever form they might appear.

Lord, help us do your will. Amen.

March 7

Monday

1 Chronicles 21:1-17

The Wages of Sin

“Was it not I who commanded the people to be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they done?”

1 Chronicles 21:17

We are not the only victims of our sinful actions. Here, King David’s hubris results in 70,000 of his subjects succumbing to plague. It doesn’t seem fair. They did nothing wrong. Why are they made to suffer? This concept is easier to understand when the infraction is murder, or assault, or some other sin with a direct and clearly negative consequence. But I think this story should serve as a reminder that all sins are equal in the eyes of God.

“Let Your hand, I pray, O Lord my God, be against me and my father’s house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued.”

When we sin, we must repent. There is some comfort in the fact that David immediately takes responsibility for the tragedy. It is the mark of true leadership to admit when one errs and to work to remedy the situation. We are so lucky to have the benefit of Jesus’ sacrifice. We know that when we ask for forgiveness, our debt is paid.

Holy God, we come to you with heavy hearts. We grieve for the victims of our sinful ways. We thank you for sending Jesus to pay our debt. Help us to remember that our lives are not our own and to keep in mind that everything we do should honor You. In your Son’s name, Amen.

March 8

Tuesday

Zechariah 3:1-10

A Clean Turban

When I'm in a bad mood, I have trouble doing the laundry. The filthy clothes pile up until I gaze at the growing mountain with more and more anxiety.

In a vision, Zechariah sees the prophet Joshua in filthy clothes, disheveled before God and the crowd, Satan watching with glee. I can almost smell him, see the stains all over his tunic, the crowd shaking their heads, asking how a man could ever stoop so low.

But, a command from God breaks through: "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan." Then, an angel of the Lord springs into action, commanding the crowd to remove Joshua's "filthy clothes" and "put a clean turban on his head." Starting with Joshua, God promises to "remove the guilt of this land in a single day," as long as the people "walk in [his] ways and keep [his] requirements.

Sometimes, we need a push to do what we know is right. Just as the crowd needed the angel's call to come to Joshua's aid, I need a dear friend's visit to forgive myself for my own sloth and tackle that mountain of dirty laundry. God is always calling on us to remember that He removes the dirt of sin and makes us clean; we just have to listen.

God, take our filthy clothes from us. Remove the guilt of this land in a single day. Wrap us in a clean turban, as the angel and the crowd did for Joshua, and make us reborn. Amen.

March 9

Wednesday

Luke 21:34- 22:6

Be On Guard ... That Day Does Not Catch You Unexpectedly

The storms did not come today.

This morning the Malinois sat alertly scanning the schoolchildren, while her handler described how K9 teams protect federal sites. The officer's uniform was crisp and clean, her shoes freshly polished with extra edge dressing. Children were delighted to receive trading card packs filled with photos of the dogs, their names, their respective breeds, and their notable achievements. They crowded in for a closer look, and asked permission to gently pet the huge dog.

This afternoon the Malinois counted cadence as the team swept the space scheduled for a press event. She stood by the rear wall as journalists and photographers filled the area. She caught the aromas of cologne and coffee and sandwiches and salads quickly consumed. She registered chairs scraping and feet shuffling while officials spoke at the podium.

Another day, the storms crushed the Malinois and her officer to the wall; jeered and kicked and pummeled and spat and smeared excrement on them both. The dog smelled sweat and frenzy and rancor and ethyl alcohol. She tensed her haunches and bared her teeth, defying the storms, awaiting permission to launch.

Today the Malinois will shed her protective vest. Her coat will be brushed smooth, she will eat and return to her kennel, her warm bed, and her favorite chew toy. The officer will secure her equipment, change out of her uniform, and return to her family until the next shift.

The storms did not come today. Perhaps not tomorrow. The team will be prepared when they come.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale, Yet will I fear no ill, For thou art with me, and thy rod, And staff me comfort still. – LBW #451, Brother James' Air

March 10

Thursday

Job 1:1-22

God's Suffering Servant

Job was divinely favored. He was a wealthy leader in his community with ten children. He obeyed the God's Law and was devoted to Him. Yet, he suffered the drastic loss of his family, wealth, and health. In his day, this punishment from God proved he had grievously sinned.

But Job believed in his innocence and imperfection and that his severe suffering was out of proportion to his sins. Initially he still praised God, but as time wore on, he began to doubt God's goodness, and he argued his case with his friends. He moaned that God was silent and had forsaken him. Job concluded that God hated him.

This was a living hell for a devout man who only wanted to reconcile innocent human suffering with the concept of a loving God. He argued his case to God and was rewarded with a miraculous vision of Divine power that re-inspired his faith and compelled his repentance.

The Book of Job is a dramatic epic narrative of a soul reaching for God. It contains a compendium of man's sins and excuses for sinning. It is a debate on theology and the punishment of God's sinful servants prior to the advent of the Messiah.

Job's story is our story today in both personal and universal ways. It is the perfect guide on our Lenten journey as we honestly examine our sinfulness but run toward the arms of Christ.

Holy God, help us to resist sin and serve You in love all our days. Amen

Conquered by Destructive Habits

“Slaves of destructive habits – for a person is a slave of anything that has conquered him.” 2 Peter 2: 19

As I settle into my quiet time of meditation, I am constantly bombarded in my monkey mind with distractions. My once peaceful practice is no more. I have even resorted to using my cell phone app, “Insight” to attempt to keep my attention from straying. I use music and gongs to hold my attention. I even need to resort to very deliberate breathing techniques. It is not the restful experience it once was. I heard a talk by a neurologist Edward Hallowell, M. D. about current day nonstop cacophony/static causing a sort of an environmental Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) condition called Variable Attention Stimulation Trait (VAST). Is the anxiety and restiveness I feel that of my own creation? Yes, I think so. I notice how long I can go without picking up my phone, my palm size computer to seek information, directions, answers to questions or check for messages. When I deliberately set aside my phone I find my attention being pulled to it again and again. I am a slave to this device to the point I cannot settle. My peace of mind has been conquered! I am living destructive habits that interfere with God’s peace which passes all understanding.

Dear Creator, help me be still and listen. Help me feel your gentleness and love. Help me be a source of peace. Help me to put aside the distractions that take away my peace. Amen

March 12

Saturday

Psalm 17

Trust in God

“O Lord, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life.” Psalm 17:14

In this Psalm, we hear David’s cry for help, his plea made honestly to God. In looking for protection from evil forces, coming to God with a frank assessment of our own heart makes us think carefully about what we are asking of God.

In preparing our heart for prayer, it may be helpful to ask ourselves: Are we being disobedient? Selfish? Is there a wrong that we should address? Are we harboring an unconfessed sin?

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew in me a right spirit, trusting in You, relying on You and following Your path for me. Amen.

March 13

Sunday

Luke 13:31-35

A Mother's Love

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Luke 13:34-35

A chicken! That kind of blows apart our image of the bearded old man, doesn't? Or the handsome blond Jesus? But Jesus has just been warned by a couple of friendly Pharisees that Herod is out to get him. Referring disrespectfully to Herod as a fox, Jesus gets to thinking about what foxes like to do best, which is to eat chickens.

Chickens are famous for fiercely protecting their broods. One story has a couple of farmers surveying a badly burnt field and noticing odd little humps here and there. The humps turn out to be dead prairie chickens covering up their little ones, who are still alive.

That's the kind of ferocious love Jesus has for each of us. So imagine him standing on Capitol Hill and surveying our city. What divisions, what mendacity, what bullying, what power grabs, what meanness! Jesus longs to gather us under his wings, and yet we are not willing. What can we do, who know God's love, to begin a new song: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord"?

Gracious and merciful Lord, we thank you for your steadfast love. Help us to sing together a new song. Amen.

March 14

Monday

Exodus 33:1-6

Promise and Pain

“But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.” Exodus 33:3

Exodus 33 picks up right after the episode of the Golden Calf. Moses had left the Israelites to meet God on Mount Sinai, and in his absence the people lost faith in a living God and turned back to the idols they had come to know in Egypt. Ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea weren't enough to convince them that God was real. They needed something solid they could see and touch, so they built what they thought they were missing.

God responds with mercy, but mercy tempered by reality. Yes, God will still give them the land God had promised them but they will journey to that land without God's presence. They will go unaccompanied and unadorned. They will journey knowing what they are missing, not the idols they thought they needed, but the God they should have been worshiping all along. They receive the promise but the pain of loss is entirely self-inflicted. And they know it. They remove their ornaments and march forward, a somber and chastised crowd.

God's love endures, even in the face of such rejection from the people God cherished and rescued. Let us keep that in mind as we continue our journey through Lent. We might also feel that we are marching forward without the presence of our God but let us also remember that God's love is never ending. The Israelites did reach the land promised to them. We, too, will arrive at Easter. And what greater love is there than that?

Generous and loving God, we thank you for your boundless love, shown to us in Jesus on the cross, in the graveyard where he was placed, and in the empty tomb of Easter morning. Lent may be a somber time, and we may be a chastised people, but we know that life and love waits for us at the end because we trust in your promises. Amen.

March 15

Tuesday

Numbers 14:10-24

Coming to Grips with Consequences

“Not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.” Numbers 14:23

We all make bad decisions sometimes. Some of those decisions are sinful, but some aren't. We make bad decisions in our finances, relationships, careers, choices with our education, raising our children, how we manage our health and bodies, how we take care of what God has given us. The list can go on and on.

It's so easy to short our commitments, discard what is right for expediency, and twist our faith to serve our own purposes. It feels good to claim the moral high ground, but maybe we skip over thoughtful understanding of an alternate perspective that is rooted in experience.

Details matter, and consequences from our bad decisions can have a ripple effect. The ones we love may very well live out the consequences of our bad decisions. Hopefully we can humble ourselves and find ways to make it right.

Dear God, thank you for your grace. We ask for guidance. Soften our hearts so that we may hear your word and lift up those around us. Let your light shine through us in all that we do. Amen.

The Narrow Door

The Narrow Door story reminds me of conversations I have had with friends over the years. We all have friends who proudly say, “I believe in God, but I don’t believe in religion.” They often get tongue tied when I ask how they foster their belief in God – how does it affect their lives? Beyond saying that they believe in God, they often don’t give God a second thought until their friend invites them to church.

I usually explain to them that religion is really a construct to help us manage our relationship with God. Some friends come from rules-bound religious traditions – they were taught that unless they followed a very specific set of rules, God reject them. I can understand why someone raised in such a tradition would be turned off if one slip-up would get them kicked out of the God Club! It’s a far cry from the warm cradle of a church where I grew up, where I was perpetually reminded that Jesus loved me (this I know) and that I could trust God would forgive my mistakes. I am grateful for that upbringing every day.

To me, the *Narrow Door* is not about an exercise to sort who gets into the God Club. It is urging us to maintain our relationship with God and fostering our faith. When Jesus says, “I do not know where you come from,” he is pointing to a lack of effort on our part to maintain the relationship. How we do that, which religious tradition we choose, is not as important as engaging with God – through prayer, praise, and caring for God’s creation. Keeping in contact with God will bring untold richness to our lives.

*Heavenly Father, keep us mindful of the importance of our relationship with you in our daily lives. Your love and mercy give meaning to everything we do.
Amen.*

March 17

Thursday

2 Chronicles 20:1-22

In God's Hands

The Big Threat was coming against them, a vast army from the other side of the Red Sea. The people came together from every town and village in Judah, “all the men of Judah with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.” Then the messenger said, “Do not be afraid or discouraged...for the battle is not yours but the Lord's.”

All these centuries later, we witness the ongoing devastations of war and strife. As a 21st century woman I find few women's voices making a difference in the Old Testament environment. Yet in Chronicles 34, God's strong and authoritative messenger is indeed a woman, Holdah, who challenges the leaders of God's people to be responsive to God's word.

This Lent, our Good Neighbors team will work with Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area to furnish our 80th apartment for Afghan refugees, who have faced fear and death in their home country. My sense of helplessness and fear for their families who remain behind and at risk even of starvation sometimes keeps me up at night. But this story of survival is part of the ongoing assurance that the work of salvation is truly in God's hands.

Dear God, give us both the discernment and strength to bear and do your will and the sure knowledge that all is ultimately in your hands.

For Christ's Sake

“What does God’s Word tell us? It tells us ‘Abraham believed God, and God saw his faith as his righteousness.’” Romans 4:3

Whoa now.

Whoa now.

Along with the Chapter that precedes it, this is the heart of Article IV of the Augsburg Confession. The one where Marty, Phil, and the Squad deal with Justification.

i.e. The Big One.

i.e. The one Luther named the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* – the article on which the Church stands or falls.

i.e. The one also known as the *lutherus begonus* – the main sticking point that got us all kicked off of Rome’s Christmas card list.

“We teach that we are not -- and cannot make ourselves -- worth the trouble of forgiveness, or even pretend to be righteous by our own merit or work, but that we receive the grace of forgiveness and righteousness in God’s eyes for one reason: because Christ did the work of suffering for us. When we believe that Christ is our forgiveness, that faith alone becomes our righteousness, for Christ’s sake.”

In this way, we become like our forefather Abraham, who received his covenant in the same fashion – by doing precisely nothing but having faith in God. God saw Abraham’s faith as righteousness, as they see ours as righteousness. Nothing less, nothing more. He didn’t do anything to deserve it – he couldn’t even begin to deserve it. Neither can we. We cannot even begin to deserve salvation. But in the coming Three Days, God is going to give it to us anyway.

Just for having faith.

Whoa now.

Holy Lord, I am not -- and cannot make myself -- worth the trouble of forgiveness, or even pretend to be righteous by my own merit or work. I do not deserve the grace of forgiveness and righteousness in your eyes. But I know Christ did the work of suffering for me. Help me believe that Christ is my forgiveness, and make my faith alone my righteousness – for Christ’s sake. Amen.

God's Everlasting Promise

*"Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.*

*²Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.*

*³Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.*

*⁴Look to the Lord and his strength;
seek his face always."*

Psalm 105:1-4

This Psalm stirs up feelings of gratitude, joy, and thanksgiving as I am reminded of God's everlasting covenant with Abraham and the oath He swore to Isaac. This text asks us to reflect on the wonders, miracles, and judgements the Lord has bestowed upon His creation so that we may consider how God bestows blessings upon us in our daily lives. Even amid difficulty and despair, God remains steadfast in His promises to each of us. Today, find a moment in the quiet and reflect on the times you've felt God has kept a promise to you, answered a prayer, placed an important person in your life's path, or guided you through a difficult time. Give thanks and praise as you meditate on the ways the Lord has shown His everlasting and unconditional love and grace to you. Rejoice in your blessings!

Dear Lord, thank you for this day and for all of my many blessings. Help me to continue to reflect on the ways you show yourself to me. Open my mind and heart to your voice as you continually guide me forward and help me to look to you and seek your face always. Amen.

March 20

Sunday

Luke 13:1-9

Jesus is All Loving

At first read, this passage can break us down. It seems as though Jesus is saying we are all sinners, as bad as the worst of society, and we will get cut down by God, like a tree that does not produce any fruit.

But, if you actually stop for a second and remember that Jesus is all loving, He is saying, “Yes, you are all sinners, but my love is here to save you.”

“Repent.” We must reflect on our sins, learn from our mistakes and be the person God wants us to be. I certainly know this to be true, and pray every day that I am forgiven for my wrongdoings. Furthermore, there is a time element to this parable. “If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.” I think we all must remember that we can die at any moment, and we must prepare for our death by asking for forgiveness and hopefully living a righteous and fulfilling life.

Lastly, when I think about this in the context of our climate crisis, I personally need to remember that I am not perfect, and no one is. But, I must strive to be as good as can be for all creation and do my very best to at least produce one measly fruit.

Lord God, I know I judge others and think that I am better than others a lot of the time. Please forgive me for my insolence. You are great. You make me great, and you make everyone great. Thank you for your love in everyone. May I do you good and protect your creation. Amen.

March 21

Monday

Jeremiah 11:1–17

Blessings of Covenants Kept

“They have turned back to the iniquities of their ancestors of old, who refused to heed my words; they have gone after other gods to serve them.”

Jeremiah 11:10a

I look away and tell myself “this passage doesn’t apply to me” – someone freed by Christ, living under a new covenant so long after the circumstances of the Hebrew prophet. In truth, though, the primary wrongdoing of Jeremiah’s audience remains something we still tend toward – idolatry. We bow to the wrong things. We fail to remember what is important. Perhaps in Jeremiah’s angry God I recoil in fear and regret of bad choices I know I continue to live by.

Ours is a monotheistic god, but one who is all-encompassing, three-in-one. Could we worship, and strive to emulate, a complex, all-knowing God’s ability to learn, willingness to be wrong, and openness to being persuaded? Does our lack of unity in caring for one another open us to destruction from without? God insists we protect one another. In reminding us through the prophetic voices, God is with us, ever faithful, and ever boundless in grace. If God’s anger gets our attention, and awakens us to the consequences of our actions, isn’t God offering us yet again the opportunity to amend our bad choices, and to enjoy the amazing grace of reconciliation? We know from God’s word and from experience that when we forgive, and are willing to be forgiven, we renew and pass on the rich promise that God will always keep: the promise of life and new life.

Today, rather than asking my neighbor, “Why are you so angry?” I think I might ask, “What am I doing to make him angry?” I prayerfully ask, too, “Who am I angry with today? Whom can I forgive? How can I gesture toward renewal? What can I do to repair my tiny part of the world?”

God of Faithfulness, you open our hearts to the sadness and beauty of your world, whenever we are willing. Help us to know your Word, and to follow your commandment of bringing your love into wherever in that world we find ourselves. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

March 22

Tuesday

Ezekiel 17:1-10

Struggling

“The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, set forth an allegory and tell it to the Israelites as a parable. A great eagle with powerful wings, long feathers and full plumage of varied colors came to Lebanon. Taking hold of the top of a cedar, he broke off its topmost shoot and carried it away to a land of merchants, where he planted it in a city of traders.” Ezekiel 17:1-4

It's not just an allegory. As the verses unfold, it's also a riddle. There is a deeper meaning which underlies the figurative form. Something is obscured. For me only? I learn the Bible by teaching kids. Since we basically sprint from Genesis & Exodus to Jonah, with a brief stop at Ruth & Naomi, I don't know the Old Testament. Its meaning is obscured. Its verses confuse me. I find the parables complicated and the lessons disguised. The prophets' words seem unnecessarily cloaked and the prophets themselves, Ezekiel in particular, seem kooky. At a time when I long to see God more clearly in my life, I'm sitting here googling “meaning of Ezekiel” because what I'm reading doesn't make any sense. (*Man, I wish there was a Sunday School lesson for Ezekiel. Wait, isn't there a bread called Ezekiel? God can give Ezekiel an actual recipe, but then it's all about Eagles and vines?*) So, back to my reflection. Do I cut and paste something I found about how the first eagle represents the King of Babylon and God is mad at the Israelites again? Instead, I'll share my true reflection upon reading this verse with you: as I struggle with the O'T, I often struggle with my faith. But as sure as I am that there is meaning shrouded somewhere in this allegory, I'm sure God is with us. He is not hiding, He's there – I just have to keep learning how to see Him.

Dear God, calm my spinning head when I struggle. Help me see you when you are so clearly everywhere.

March 23

Wednesday

Luke 13:18-21

In God's Kitchen

I sometimes say that Easter is my favorite food holiday. It usually elicits a laugh, but I seriously love ham, fresh spring vegetables and salads, maybe a deviled egg or three or four, and all the other foods served on Easter Sunday, and the friends and family that meal often brings together.

But it isn't just the Easter Sunday meal. In some ways, the entire Lent season is built around food. People in the South and in Scandinavia typically indulge in King Cake or Semla, for example, before Ash Wednesday kicks off Lent. Many people give up foods they love for Lent, like meat on Fridays. I've been known to give up cheese for Lent on several occasions. I have vivid memories of the Wednesday Lenten services I attended as a kid with the soup and bread dinner shared with the congregants beforehand. The Last Supper. The Seder Supper. Easter baskets filled with candy and hard boiled eggs. Indulgence, sacrifice, nourishment.

The parables told in Luke 13:18-21, of the mustard seed and of yeast, made me initially think of the work one does in the kitchen. Of taking small things and assembling them into something LARGER, maybe something complex, hopefully something delicious, and something to share.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed tells the story of something so small and perhaps insignificant—a mustard seed-- growing into something beautiful and big—a tree—and then eventually providing a home for birds. Truly, a wonder of God.

The parable of yeast shows how something as small as yeast can turn A LOT of flour into bread to share. The nourishment of God.

Dear Lord, As we begin our Lenten journey this year, we are reminded of your parables, and how small things are often so much more than they initially appear. Your blessings have built, sustained, and nourished Reformation. And we thank you for those small things that we may not yet see or realize that will further nourish our church community. We thank you for your love, your sacrifices for us, your forgiveness of our indulgences, and the wonder you create out of the smallest things. In your name we pray. Amen

March 24

Thursday

Numbers 13:17-27

The Light of a New Day

“They gave Moses this account: We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey. Here is its fruit.” Numbers 13:27

I feel a strong connection to these words, because they make me think about the paths we choose to take in life, and the importance of creating positive ripples along the way, even though we may not see the support and strength, encouragement and resolve, opportunity and reward they will give to others setting off on their journey.

They have inspired believers across generations, and lift me to celebrate the rediscovery of my Lutheran faith at Reformation. As a Greek proverb poignantly puts it: ***“Society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.”***

Lord, thank you for allowing me to see the light of a new day. I ask you to continue to walk alongside me on life's path, nourishing my soul with wisdom, empowering me when I doubt myself, and protecting me when in danger. Help me to see others who may feel forgotten, and let my words be your voice of comfort. Continue to inspire me to speak in truth, without malice or spite, and allow me to share the grace you have given to me. All this I ask in your wonderful name. Amen.

Walk the Walk

“Do you, my friend, pass judgment on others? You have no excuse at all, whoever you are. For when you judge others and then do the same things which they do, you condemn yourself. We know that God is right when he judges the people who do such things as these. But you, my friend, do those very things for which you pass judgment on others!” Romans 2:1-3

This passage exemplifies the familiar “walk the walk, don’t just talk the talk” common idiom: don’t judge other people for a sin that you also commit. At the passage’s core, Paul instructs us to show our faith and character through our deeds as God will know if we’re just going through the motions from a pew on Sunday mornings. Our actions matter: if we keep on doing good, God will reward us with honor, peace and eternal life.

I was struck by the varied vocabulary to describe God’s moods and actions. In my version, God and His actions are described as “right, great kindness, tolerance, patience, kind, anger, righteous judgment, anger, fury, [able to inflict] suffering and pain, glory, honor and peace.” This is a mix of loving and terrifying adjectives. I think it is natural to want to view our personal relationship with God in that first category and to believe that God reserves his anger and fury for others, such as those who have committed great sins. We certainly don’t view ourselves as in that same category. This may be why Paul asked if we despise the fact that sinners also receive God’s loving attributes and actions as he leads his people on a path to repentance. Yet Paul reminds us that we should not judge others for the same actions we commit and that God knows what is written on our hearts and in our conscience. We should consider our own sins and improve our actions, while allowing others that same path. Overall, this passage reminds us to focus on our own personal relationship with God and living his message in a way to earn his great kindness, tolerance and patience.

Oh God, during this season of reflection, help me to focus on examining my own deeds and living my life in a way that cultivates your kindness and love.

My Hope is in You

Growing up I did not understand psalms. They were always sung in church in that odd mostly monotonic way until the last few syllables of each phrase. They were overly cryptic and without much explanation (note that Jesus would follow up with an explanation on most of his parables). So, I mostly wrote them off.

Now here I have been assigned a psalm for reflection in FATE. No getting out of this now. Now I have to deal with handbreadths (yes, they still measure horses by hands) and the word Selah which does not have a great translation as there are disagreements over what it meant. In this case I will go with Selah meaning to pause/reflect/breathe. In NRSV it comes after the phrase “a mere breath”, in KJV it comes after the word vanity. Did I mention psalms felt overly cryptic?

Life is fleeting, days are numbered, we are here like a passing guest. Selah indeed. While we grace this planet, we want to make a difference. We, like the psalmist, can feel broken and exhausted and driven to tears.

Yet there in the center of the psalm is the piece which can hold us together in the midst of all the frustration and weariness: My hope is in you // Deliver me from all my transgressions.

When I feel frazzled and frustrated, when I feel like I am spinning my wheels and not making any progress, when my sins weigh me down but my good deeds feel fleeting, this is the center I need to hold on to. Selah.

God, our hope is in you. Too easily we get lost in our daily irritations. Remind us to pause, reflect, and breathe. Amen.

The Prodigal Son: What Happens the Morning After?

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” Luke 15: 28-32

We all know this parable. The father represents our ever-loving and forgiving God and the sons his indignant and unrepentant children.

The parable comes to a jolting ending – we don’t know what happens next or in the morning. Hey Jesus, is there a sequel? Will the father and his children live happily ever after? The youngest son returns to his father’s house in hopes of being an expendable hired hand, yet the father immediately restores him to a son’s privileges with a feast. But the father neglected to call his oldest son in from the fields and he only finds out of his brother’s return after the celebration is in full swing. The oldest son believes that his obedience is that of a slave to his father, rather than of a son to his father. The young son was lost and now found and in the house, while the oldest son is taken for granted because the oldest son is always with his father and he now remains outside of the house.

What happens in the morning? Will the father be parent shamed? Does the young son repent? Will he live closer to his father’s values like his brother? Technically, the oldest son owns the (half) estate on which his father lives. Does the oldest son allow his brother’s return to full son status within his household? Or did the father not give the oldest son control of the remaining estate when he gave half to the younger son, and will the father divide the estate again upon his death?

Dear Lord, I thank you for my everyday blessings as I try to walk daily with you, and I celebrate all who find you on their paths in this life. Amen.

Days for Confession and Celebration

The Jewish calendar marks fifteen major holidays of which Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the holiest day. It is immediately followed by Sukkot, the harvest Feast of Tabernacles. The book of Leviticus contains God's regulations for how the Jews would properly conduct the activities of those days.

On Yom Kippur, the priest had to sacrifice specific farm animals and offer grain and wine before God in the Temple to *ritually* purify himself and the people of their sins. Sin cannot be ignored; it brings death, which is separation from God. But blood represents life and when the priest sprinkled it on the things that represented fellowship with God—the ark, the throne, the altar—deathly sin was purified and blotted out. The act was a somber ceremony of blood forfeiture for sin, but not of the peoples' own blood. It restored man consciously to harmony with God.

Sukkot commemorates the journey of the Jews through the desert and their first harvest in the promised land. For seven days of this holiday, the Jews were to camp out in booths or tents made of leafy branches and consume the meat of large numbers of sacrificed bulls, rams, and lambs. It was a happy feast of thanksgiving and a memory of God's provenance.

In these divinely directed activities, the Jews were reminded of how to live holy lives in service and gratitude to God. We are reminded too, because these actions are the picture of Christ Jesus, the Lamb who died for our sins and the one who beckons us to receive the bread of life and wine of salvation from Him. We are blessed to live in harmony with Him forever. Thanks be to God!

Holy God, thank you for our daily bread and for delivering us from evil. Amen.

March 29

Tuesday

Leviticus 25:1-19

Sabbath

“But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you. . .” Leviticus 25:4a, 6a

How did God's instruction to give the land a sabbath strike the Israelites? Was it safely theoretical, with any concern about obligations not beginning for six years after reaching the promised land eclipsed by the desire to stop wandering around the desert? Was anyone planning fun and enriching activities for their leisure time during the sabbath year? Or did the Israelites react like I would, starting to worry far in advance about how they would survive the year without growing and harvesting food? After seeing the plagues, watching the Red Sea part, and collecting manna six days out of every seven, it might seem the Israelites had sufficient examples of God's care for them to trust in God's provision during the sabbath year. But the record shows that the Israelites, like me, had difficulties trusting that God would provide, or remembering that everything we think we own or control actually belongs to God.

We know now that allowing land to lie fallow is an important sustainable agriculture technique. As God's world and many of the people made in God's image are suffering due to climate change, the wisdom of adopting practices that care for God's world has never been clearer. Richer nations and their citizens must drastically change to prevent still worse climate-related catastrophes. How could the concept of a sabbath year for the land apply to our own actions and consumption patterns?

Dear God, give our leaders wisdom to support policies and programs that will enable your world to heal and sustain all of your peoples with dignity. Thank you that we can trust you to provide for us even as we confront the changes in our own lives that will be necessary to restore your creation.

March 30

Wednesday

Luke 9:10-17

That Time Jesus Asked Us to Perform a Miracle

James: This crowd is getting hangry.

Jesus: You give them something to eat.

Andrew: Surely, you're not serious.

John: He can't be.

Thomas: It can't be done.

Matthew: It's a mathematical impossibility.

Philip: I'm starving

Bartholomew: Five loaves and two fish will barely feed the 13 of us.

James: We could buy more food.

Judas: Yeah, right, we don't have two pennies to rub together.

Peter: I think it was a joke

Simon: That's not funny

Thaddaeus: What are we going to do?

At this point in our journey, we've witnessed Jesus heal the sick, resurrect the dead, and cast demons into a herd of pigs. What possible grounds do we have to doubt Him?

I suppose it's different this time. Jesus says we must perform this miracle. Fine, okay, but we're only human. We can't just wave a hand and turn nothing into something.

But we can put their faith in Him.

Hello Father, thank you for being here. Thank you for being there for us when we doubt ourselves. Thank you for reminding us that with you, all things are possible. In Your son's name, Amen.

An Outpouring of Abundance

“... Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors...” 2 Kings 4:3

This passage features a woman in a heart-wrenching dilemma. Recently widowed, she is now threatened with the loss of her two sons, not only having them taken from her, but to be sold into slavery. Rich in faith, however, she turns to Elisha who directs her to her community, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors...” Through God’s miraculous ways, the widow and her sons fill all the empty vessels from their tiny jar of oil, sell the oil, and live off the profits.

Her community was key in her salvation. Had they not shared their extra vessels, or maybe their only vessel, this miracle would not have been possible. This reminds me of the Buy Nothing Project. It is a hyper-local gift economy group focused on building community through giving of your own abundance without receiving anything in return- no barter or trades, just freely giving. Members request things they need or post their extra material goods, talent, and time that they have to give. I’ve seen requests for good vibes as one member ran their first marathon (which she received in spades!), old dog supplies gifted to furnish the houses of new puppies, free yoga classes at Lincoln park, offers to mend old sweaters, nearly empty peanut butter jars gifted to make a lucky dog’s day, and so much more! In a society so mired in greed and overconsumption, habits that are killing our beloved planet and sickening our souls, it gives me hope to see people freely giving and receiving as God blesses them. What abundance has God given you to share?

Dear Lord, this Lenten season help us to give up the fear of not enough and instead rest in the peace of the abundance all around us.

April 1

Friday

Revelation 19:1-9

Guess Who's Coming to Supper?

"Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." Revelation 19:9

If you were exiled to a rocky Aegean island for refusing to worship the Roman emperor, what would you dream about? The defeat of the empire by the power of God? A dangerous idea in a letter, unlikely to pass the censors! An angel's weird story about the defeat of "the whore of Babylon" and the survival of a joyful multitude? The couriers couldn't decipher it, but the churches might.

The message goes far beyond vengeance, to the profound image of a marriage supper -- the marriage of the Lamb of God with the whole creation.

John expected the divine victory right away. Yet three centuries later the Empire was not destroyed. It absorbed the Church itself!

John wrote better than he knew! In the power of the Spirit, the letter reveals Christ as "the Alpha and the Omega" -- who lives with us in love from beginning to end. The key is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, whose full meaning continues to unfold. Matthew spoke of Christ's presence in "the least of these" who are hungry or thirsty or naked or in need of shelter or liberation. Jesus also invited the rich and powerful, including policy makers and tax collectors, to that supper, and saw even lepers and prostitutes as divine guests.

We are all invited to supper. And guess who else is coming?

My Heart is Steadfast, O God, My Heart is Steadfast

I am not particularly steadfast. I am often anxious, untrusting, and indecisive. Was David, the author of this psalm, a better, more Godly man than me? Probably. I hope so. He was the King of Israel, handpicked by God, responsible for the physical and spiritual lives of a lot of people. But then again, I've never gone out of my way to have someone killed.

Was David's heart steadfast? I don't know. How can any of us really know? Maybe David's prayer here is aspirational. With his enemies attacking him head on, and lying in wait to bring him down, maybe David was praying a kind of "fake it til you make it" prayer. He laid out his troubles, then reminded himself that God is steadfast and faithful, and tried to talk himself into being the same.

God, your steadfast love is as high as the heavens, and your faithfulness extends to the clouds. I hesitate to call other people my enemies, but certainly, I have plenty of troubles. I am often anxious, untrusting, and indecisive. I see the purpose you have set out for me, and I wonder, why me? I hope that your love and faithfulness can help me learn to be steadfast. And until then, I will give thanks to you and sing your praises.

April 3

Sunday

John 12:1-8

Jesus, The One Chosen by God

“Mary came in with a jar of very expensive aromatic oils, anointed and massaged Jesus’ feet and then wiped them with her hair. The fragrance of the oils filled the house.” John 12:4

This scripture is a very touching story of hospitality and friendship between Jesus and his friends. Jesus had been on the road to Bethany, and at the end of his journey Mary and Martha tend to his needs. Martha serves him food and Mary cares for his feet. The word used to describe Mary’s gift to Jesus is a special word. She *anointed* Jesus’ feet. The word *anointed* means that she not only cleaned Jesus’ feet after his walk on the dusty, grimy trail. On a deeper level her action recognized and honored Jesus as the Savior and Lord.

I see Mary’s act as a model for me and perhaps for you too. As we go about our daily lives, whether at work or school or in our community life or in our home, what we do and the way we do it is more than just getting the job done. It can also be an anointing – a way of honoring the person as a child of God.

Bless our interactions that our touch may also be an anointing – the fragrance of your blessing.

April 4

Monday

Exodus 40:1-15

Holy Boundaries

“You shall also anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar, so that the altar shall be most holy.” Exodus 40:10

Over the last two years I have sought out the holy in the ordinary and the mundane. Because of the pandemic and other circumstances, I have not attended church in person since March of 2020. Yet my life has not been void of the holy or consecrated. How do we take these instructions the Lord provides for Moses in creating a sacred space for worship and apply them to our own lives? How do we consecrate our spaces so that our lives are anointed with the grace and mercy of God and we can then pour it out to others?

As a child reading these texts, I always took them as a list of rules, a way that God wanted to keep us from having fun and enjoying things. As an adult, I see them as ways God seeks to help us create space in our lives to honor God and renew ourselves. In an age when “boundaries” is a watchword and many of us seek to understand what our boundaries are and what they should look like, this provides us a template for how to make our spaces holy. This gives us a blueprint to follow in taking time to set up our tent, to take the time to anoint our spaces, to prepare our utensils for daily living, whether with oil or metaphorically.

Dear God, Grant us the ability to create anointed spaces and to be renewed by your holy presence in our lives. Amen.

April 5

Tuesday

Judges 9:7-15

Anointing the bramble

This is a story about clans or tribes in the early days of Israel. They wanted someone to lead them. There were 70 brothers and half-brothers. Abimelech, son of Jerub-Baal, offered to lead them and they voted for him. He was the first self-declared King of Israel, but he was ruthless, power-hungry and overconfident. Leading them for 3 years. Out of the 70 brothers and half-brothers, he killed all but one, Jotham, who fled.

During this period the people suffered and asked God to help them. God was angry because they were worshiping other gods. Finally, they asked forgiveness and said they would not worship any other gods but Him. The Lord had compassion and forgave them. Over the years the Israelites did evil in the site of the Lord. He delivered them to the Philistines for 40 years. Sampson was born and grew up and was in God's favor. Throughout Judges 9-15 at different times the Israelites, leaders, and Kings fell from God's favor and grace.

How does this relate to our reflections for Lent? Look at our political system, our individual lives. Are we following the Lord and are we in his grace always? In Lent, we are remembering the story of Jesus and what he has done for the world with his healing, miracles, and shedding his blood for all of us that we might be forgiven.

Lord God, help us to remember all you have done for us. Help us to treat our neighbors as ourselves. Help us to renew our relationship with you daily. In the name of your Son, Jesus, we pray and ask it. Amen.

April 6

Wednesday

Luke 18:31-34

Jesus Foretells His Death

“But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.” Luke 18:34

Upon the first reading of this passage, a similar experience of mine pops into my head. In early March 2020, we were on the precipice of spring break at UVA. One of my good friends predicted that we would not return to Grounds afterwards – that this new virus would be causing big problems in a week or two. I thought she was crazy! I did not understand. A measly 7 days later, it would be a very different story.

As humans, we’re more than a little dense sometimes. God tries Their best to let us know what’s up, to let us know what’s coming, but try as They may, our heads are buried in the sand. I imagine Jesus in this passage jumping up and down in front of the disciples, waving his arms: “Guys! Some scary stuff is about to happen! It’s important!” But alas, for worse or for better, they did not understand.

To be honest, I suppose we as humans could endeavor to become less dense, and pay more attention. This might be a good idea, and help us along, but I think it’s a little bit futile. We’re always going to miss things, no matter how much God is trying to tell us, our ears will always have at least a little sand in them.

Therefore, when push comes to shove, we’re just left to trust in God when the crazy stuff starts to hit the fan. Chaotic, but beautiful (in my opinion).

Dear God, help us clear the sand out of our ears, but more importantly help us sit in the discomfort and trust in You when we find ourselves in situations we never even saw coming. Amen.

April 7

Thursday

Habakkuk 3:2-15

The Timeless Question – Where is God Today?

“You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one.”

Habakkuk 3:13

Habakkuk is a fascinating book in the Old Testament. While little is known about the person Habakkuk, the writings reflect the struggle to believe that God was good when the world around was filled with war and grief. In my research I learned these texts are believed to have been written between 612 and 588 BC and that Habakkuk was a man of vigorous faith rooted deeply in the religious traditions of Israel. I find myself thinking that similar to Habakkuk’s time and throughout the ages, persecution, war, hunger, fear, prejudice, and injustice abound. And, that through the ages we have wondered about God’s purpose with heavy but hopeful hearts. We can feel as Habakkuk felt, frustrated and confused, sometimes asking why an all-powerful God would allow such evil to persist. But there is hope and praise throughout the text and towards the end of the text the phrase “In wrath remember mercy” is a powerful prayer that while there are many evils, God promises mercy, forgiveness, and grace for all.

Dear God, Help us share your hope and mercy and feel your presence and love today and every day.

April 8

Friday

1 John 2:18-28

Are You Sure?

The only thing more relentless than the newspaper headlines these days is the seeming demand to have opinions about them. “Hot Takes” abound, whether on cable news, social media, or casual chit-chat between friends. Up vote or down vote, like or dislike? It seems everyone must have an opinion about everything, always.

But are you sure? How certain are you of your opinions? Are you getting the full story? Have you factored in everything? Is your analysis correct? Are you biased by your worldview? How will your “hot take” sound in a month, a year, or a decade?

I’m unsure.

But 1 John 2:18-28 talks about certainty. “You have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and you know that no lie comes from the truth.” We KNOW the truth about Jesus Christ our Savior, and no lie will come from THAT truth. This is not a “hot take.” This is not an opinion that will change. We are anointed with that knowledge, at our baptism and beyond. Building upon that bedrock, we can proceed with a powerful conversation of WHAT that truth compels us to do.

Get out of the news/opinion cycle and its attendant uncertainty. Instead, cherish the confidence that His truth gives us. “Abide in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming.”

Dear Lord, thank you for the confidence we have in your truth. In a shifting world, it is the bedrock upon which we can build. Amen.

You Can't Take It With You (Or Can You?)

“Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand. Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God. They will collapse and fall, but we shall rise and stand upright.” Psalm 20:6-8

Our teenager doesn't usually just ask “What?” when he wants to understand something better. He actually asks “What is it? What is it, Mommy?” I could never quite understand why he did this, until my wife pointed out that I do it too! When I don't hear something right, without conscious thought, I also ask with a very puzzled look “What is it?”

Kids are funny that way. It's been said that a lot of our cultural values and behaviors are “caught” not “taught”. Somehow, he absorbed this behavior from me.

How does this tie into Psalm 20 where David writes things like “some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God. They will collapse and fall, but we shall rise and stand upright”?

Well, we all know the saying “You can't take it with you” right? It's all about not putting so much of our self-worth into material things. After all, our modern day chariots (okay cars) won't do us much good when it's our time.

But...the key takeaway for me is this question of “it”. What is “it” exactly? Maybe instead of a car, it's our faith. Shifting away from using our money to have more things, to using it to do more things with those we love--creating memories and modeling gratitude. (And helping those less fortunate of course.)

So maybe we can take it with us! “It” being our faithfulness and love of God. And if we're really lucky, maybe the children we love will “catch” that from us. My prayer for all of us is

“Dear God, please help me to focus less on what I have, and focus more on what I have to share! Amen.”

April 10

Palm Sunday

Luke 19:38-40

Faith and Courage in a Time of Crisis

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” Luke 19:38-40

I felt nothing when I first read Luke chapter 19 verses 28-40. I read it a few more times. Nada. I called my mother, colleagues, trusted mentors, and then I prayed. I heard God say, “Stop and Listen.” The world is more chaotic than ever, people are sick and dying, isolated and afraid, and we long for the way life used to be before Covid. As we find ourselves wondering how we can continue, we must remember the courage of Christ when he knew he would soon be crucified. We must say a prayer of thanks to God for enabling us to see this season as an opportunity to grow closer to him and to feel a deep connection to something larger than ourselves.

Let us give thanks to God for sending Jesus to save us. We ask for peace when our expectations are not always met, for joy in proclaiming the work of God and courage to speak when it is easier to remain silent.

Dinah

“And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob; he loved the maiden and spoke tenderly to her.” Genesis 34:3

Chapter 34 of Genesis was probably not taught in your Sunday School.

Most of us associate the name “Dinah” with an old camp song: “Who’s in the kitchen with Dinah?” Did we know that the name was used as a generic name for Black women by Northern soldiers in the Civil War (just as “Sambo” was a generic name for Black men)?

Who was she? The daughter of Jacob and Leah, one of their seven children, and someone who went to visit her new neighbors (vs. 1) and was “raped” by Shechem (vs.2), prince of the Hivites, of the land of Canaan. That is all we really know; she may have been with the Israelites as they migrated to Egypt during a famine; if so, she probably recognized her half-brother Joseph as the powerful vizier for the Pharaoh when she got there.

Anita Diamant’s novel *The Red Tent* takes Dinah’s story in another direction entirely, making her a modern hero for women of today. This could be a parable for today’s social media world: sexual violation of a woman by a powerful man; duplicitous bargaining by two groups (Jacob’s tribe and the Hivites, vs.13 and vs.23) both for their own vengeance or gain; retaliation with violence (vs.25); no real resolution to the issue at hand. (In addition, it seems that Shechem really loved Dinah, see above.)

All this mayhem and barbarism *before* Jacob becomes Israel in Chapter 35, which may be the point: God is always working with God’s people, God is constantly reminding us of our humanity, God IS.

Dear Creator God: Your grace helps us to understand your people’s story more clearly. Please help us to hear it. Amen.

Personal Trauma, Community Action

“Then he commanded the men whom he sent, saying, ‘Thus shall you say to all the Israelites, ‘Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out.’” Judges 19:30

This was a difficult text to read. It is violent, horrific, brutal. The Levite and his concubine were traveling back to his home from Bethlehem. He chose to stop in Gibeah specifically because it was a part of Israel and he expected safe refuge. But no one offered to take them in for the night until an old man spotted them and gave shelter.

That night, the men of the city besieged the old man’s house. Ultimately, they beat and raped the concubine and by the next morning she was dead. The Levite took her home, cut her body into twelve pieces and sent them to the other tribes of Israel.

The senseless violence- the depraved, relentless, wicked behavior of the men of Gibeah- is deeply upsetting. It helped to put the story into context. This took place “when there was no king in Israel” and anarchy gave opportunity to unbridled violence. And, the butchering of the concubine’s body was gruesome, but there was purpose in it. The Levite sent a message along with his servants when they delivered the body parts across Israel: “Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out.” Another translation of this ends more strongly: “We must do something! So speak up!” He shared his trauma and called for support and action from the rest of his Israeli brethren. God gave the Levite a community to turn to after this tragedy. He did not have to suffer alone, and the lawless, atrocious behavior of Gibeah did not go unchecked. I see similar inspiration in contemporary protests and social justice actions.

*Dear God, thank you for inspiring us to share, care, help and hope together.
Amen.*

April 13

Wednesday

2 Samuel 13:1-22

Violence Against Tamar

“But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she was, he forced her and lay with her.” 2 Samuel 13:14

Seriously?! This is my first thought after reading the text for today. Over and over again, women are used and abused in the Bible. The story just before this one is about David lusting over Bathsheba, getting her pregnant and then having her husband killed in battle so he could marry her. And how did God punish David? He killed his newborn son. So really, Bathsheba is raped, impregnated, husband murdered, and baby dies... Who's really being punished here?

Then in today's text we hear about Amnon who wants to lie with his half-sister and lures her into his room pretending to be ill. Being a good sister, she goes to take care of him. But when he asks her to lie with him she says “no” and rather than reject him totally, she tells him to ask for her hand so they can be together in the right way. Does he listen to her? Nope, he rapes her. After he's done, he becomes angry at her; classic victim blaming.

These are the stories in the Bible that make me think: “what in the world am I supposed to learn from this?!” And, in all honesty, I have no idea. Maybe that's the point of today's reading: we have no idea and need to trust that God's love is nothing like a man's sexual desire.

Gracious God, sometimes the Bible is confusing and frustrating. Especially for us women. What are you trying to teach us? Two rape stories back to back is rather over the top, don't you think?! Just hoping for a little clarity. Amen.

April 14

Maundy Thursday John 13:1-17, 31-35

Love for One Another

“... all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13: 35

In these passages Jesus turns his actions into a metaphor and then verbally gives emphasis and clarity to the meaning of his actions. It is out of his love for his disciples that Jesus washes their feet. He takes on the servant role, and all who are to be his own must take on the same role. Yes, this applies to each of us. We are to love one another, even the stranger, because love is central to all of creation. This is not the only place where Jesus stresses the importance of love, but here we have a physical demonstration, a central marker in his preaching.

Can you transport yourself back to this scene? Imagine how confusing it was to try to understand the mysteries related to Jesus, yet, you know that he is the Lord, yes right in your midst is this man of power and love. Your mind whirls at the thought that he would wash your feet. You see in this a displacement of the mysteries and a central focus only on love. You know that love can wrap around you, and you want to be freed by his love. And there he kneels to wash your feet, your feet. A glimpse of redemption floods your mind. You ask how it can be, and you love that it is. He has called you by name, and you are his. Now, come back, return to the present, here to love all of God's children.

Lord Jesus, bear our prayer, enable our hearts to do as you have said, to love one another as you first have done. Amen

Why Has God Forsaken Me?

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?
My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.*

Psalm 22:1-2

I find it impossible to read Psalm 22 without hearing Jesus' words on the cross (Mark 15:34). But this year, as we enter the third year of the pandemic, I also hear the cries of so many of my friends, family members, neighbors, congregants, and a multitude of people across the world. With suffering so widespread, varied in its details yet a common thread through the lives of so many, it is easy, perhaps even right, to feel that God has forsaken us.

Suffering is a common theme during Lent. It seems so much more personal this year, so easy to reach out and touch it.

Let us sit with our grief. It's ok to wallow, to cry out in anguish, to just cry. Hold open those places of uncertainty and brokenness for yourself and for others.

Hope is on the horizon; healing will come. Christ *is* risen, and we will also rise. "They will proclaim [God's] righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!"

Risen Christ, be with us in our grief. Help us always keep our eyes on you and draw upon the hope that you give us. Amen.

When We Hit a Spiritual Impasse.... Then What?

This year I was given an assignment to write a daily segment of From Ashes to Easter based on 1 Samuel 4:1-11 I found myself overwhelmed by a sense of being inadequate to this task. So much talk today is of warfare, fighting, victory or defeat... just as it was in ancient Bible times. Then, what I focused on and what I seemed primarily to be thinking about was what was happening NOW here and within our own nation. Talk of Russia, tanks, tens of thousands of troops, missiles, the possibility or likelihood and timing of an invasion in the Ukraine. And so, what could you or I do about these matters...we who have seemingly or actually so little in terms of position or power?

Today's Bible text does, however, speak of the **Ark of the Covenant**, a sacred wooden chest that contained the tables of the Laws of God given to the Children of Israel and to Moses on the Mountain. In the early days, this **Ark** was regarded as a symbol of the actual presence of God and carried into battle as a sign of both encouragement and hope.

Perhaps, during this season of Lent we might choose an object of meaning to become our own Ark of the Covenant which would remind us of the Reality that we are to be persons of both encouragement and hope as they come to us anew each day.

And so we pray....Creator, Redeeming and Inspiring Lord, grant us your gifts of encouragement and hope as we enthusiastically share God's peace and goodwill! Amen!!!

“Jesus Resurrection, Our Resurrection”

“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb...They found the stone rolled away. They went in but did not find the body...Suddenly two men in dazzling clothes...said to them... “He is not here, but has risen.” Returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven...Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them...”

From Luke 24:1-12

On Friday late afternoon, the women didn't have time to properly prepare the body for burial as the sabbath was quickly approaching. So, early Sunday, they came to the tomb with spices to complete the rite for their beloved master. In reading the text, we see that finding the stone rolled away and hearing the angels' message turned their terror to amazement and then to joy at the news Jesus had been raised from the dead.

The story tells us that the disciples were a little slow to believe, but the women understood: “Jesus was alive again!” It was a joy that didn't have to wait but began that very Easter Day.

Origen of Alexandria, a Christian ascetic and theologian from the 3rd century, said, “*If you believe that Christ has risen from the dead, you must also believe that you yourselves have likewise risen with Him.*”

As we celebrate this great Feast of Feasts, let us also believe with all our hearts that Jesus' resurrection means our resurrection too. That whatever uncertainty or sorrow we have now will soon turn to joy because of Easter Day. And so, we can sing “Alleluia!”

Risen Lord, raise us also to new life. Not only in the life to come but today. Alleluia! Amen!

ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

March 2 IVY FINKENSTADT is a current member of the Reformation Council, Sunday School teacher for 3rd and 4th Grade, and sometimes-singer in the church choir. Ivy is a lawyer and writer, mother of Graham and Maxwell, and wife to Dan. She lives in Cheverly, MD, with her family.

March 3 MATT AVILES is a Fairfax native, current D.C. resident, and lifelong Lutheran. He has been a member of Reformation for four years where he is involved with the Youth Group and the Finance Committee. He is a huge sports fan, particularly of the Caps, Duke basketball, and whatever soccer match is playing at the time. Matt loves to explore new places in the city, so if you have any good tips send them his way.

March 4 KIMBERLY FIGEL BENOIT has been a member of Reformation for the past 11 years. She is active in caring ministries and fellowship committees. Her favorite things are her church mom friends, outer space, her vespa, and of course, coffee hour.

March 5 KATIE LEESMAN and her husband, Mike Ly, have been Reformation members since 2008 when they lived on the Hill. They now live in the Langdon neighborhood of DC with their two children, Olivia (age 4) and Vinh (born December 20, 2021) and their cat, Daisy (age 15).

March 6 CHRISTINE POMMERENING BERRY was born and raised in Germany, and has been a member of Reformation since 2005. She and her husband Todd were married here in 2010 and live in Arlington, VA. They enjoy driving their various antique vehicles around town, and playing fetch in the backyard with their two puppies, Max Dieter and Lexie Dagmar. Christine teaches public policy at George Mason University and at the Foreign Service Institute.

March 7 EVAN SCHRAGE is a lawyer living and working in the NoMa neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Prior to moving to the District of Columbia, he lived in Chicago, IL, East Lansing, MI, and Phoenix, AZ. He has been a member of Lutheran Church of the Reformation since 2019.

March 8 WILL ANDERSON joined Reformation in 2019. He teaches 1st and 2nd grade Sunday School with Helene Sherburne and Kiri Nicholson, his partners-in-crime.

March 9 JUDITH MANGUBAT was christened and confirmed at Reformation. She tells stories about children's chapel, mitten tree, vacation bible school, Sister Pearle's prayer gloves, Miss Washabaugh's summer pageants, Pastor Youse and Pastor Seltzer critiquing confirmands' essays. She is lifelong friends with Pete the Pig and flannelgraphs.

March 10 JULIETTE JONES and her husband Marvin have been members of Reformation forever, and their four children were baptized and confirmed there. They have two grandchildren. They look forward to post-Covid fellowship at Reformation.

March 11 LIZ TUCKERMANTY has been a member of Reformation since 1980. She lives in Cheverly, MD with her husband, Dale Manty. She spends time teaching contemplative practices for the Shalem Institute. and lots of time with three grandchildren who she takes to school each day. She is helping establish the Mount Hope Commission in Cheverly to address inequity issues through research, education, healing and reconciliation.

March 12 JULIE HASLER has been a member of Reformation since the early 1990's. She currently works in Government Affairs for a medical device company. She is a member of the Capitol Hill Tennis Club and lives in Arlington, VA.

March 13 EVA STEEGE grew up in Duluth, Minnesota and was ordained at Reformation. She served churches in New England for ten years before returning to this Synod, where she served four congregations as interim pastor. She is now retired and learning to knit! Eva and her husband, Ted, live in College Park.

March 14 In the Before Times CRAIG HAAS was a regular attendee of the 8:30 service. He sits at the front of the church so you would know him by the back of his head. Look for the bald guy with increasingly grey hair.

March 15 TIMOTHY MCENIRY-Roschke has been a member at Reformation for about 10 years and generally attends the 8:30

service with his daughter Eimear (age 5). He lives in Cheverly, Maryland and spends most snow days planning out his garden for the summer.

March 16 DIANE KOHN is a Foreign Service Officer currently serving in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She has previously served in Nigeria, Lithuania, Romania, and Washington, D.C. A Capitol Hill resident when stateside, she has been a member of Reformation for 21 years, and still sings with the choir whenever possible. Her Diplopets Moses cat (16) and Sparky dog (15) have accompanied her on all of her assignments.

March 17 KATHRYN TOBIAS, a Reformation member since 1977, loves writing, assisting refugees through Good Neighbors Capitol Hill; helping young South Africans transform their lives through the Bokamoso Youth Foundation. She looks forward to post-Covid singing and traveling and enjoys gathering with family and friends in the Cheverly pod.

March 18 JARROD JABRE is currently stoked to be your Director of Operations.

March 19 ELIZABETH HANN lives in Columbia Heights with her husband, Morgan, and fur baby, Irie. She juggles wearing many hats including but not limited to Social Worker, Writer, Candle-maker, Romance Novel enthusiast, Tea addict, Insect/Oddities Collector, and all-around Halloween lover. Elizabeth currently serves on Council and the Spiritual Growth Committee.

March 20 DAN O'BRIEN was raised Catholic and has been a Reformation member since 2014. He is extremely blessed to have joined this community and looks forward to sharing his love once COVID is defeated. He prays you all stay safe and healthy. Feel free to call him if you need a friend: 845-750-1480.

March 21 JOHN HAGOOD has worshiped at Reformation since 2005, and is currently serving on Council and the board of Southeast Ministry. He enjoys work as a librarian, and recreation as a singer in choirs. He and Laura enjoy life as members of a wonderfully neighborly community in Truxton Circle.

March 22 JESSICA SNOWDEN and her husband James began attending Reformation in 2018 after sending their son, Charlie, to Sunday School so they could have an hour to themselves. Once they started staying for service, they felt immediately welcomed. The church and congregation have given them renewed faith, a lot more people to love and be loved by, and an outlet for creativity and service.

March 23 LAURA SWANSON is a Reformation Council Member. She lives in Northeast DC with her husband and 4 year old son, and loves to cook and read.

March 24 LYNDON SMITH first attended in the spring of 2019. After growing up Pentecostal, he chose to be re-baptized and became a member of Reformation. He currently sits on the Church Council as the liaison for Reformation's Social Justice Ministries. He has a passion for French wines and fine dining, and a love of photography and Badminton.

March 25 DINA FINKEL has been a member of Reformation since 2019 and lives in Capitol Hill East with her pandemic rescue dog, Fitzwilliam Darcy, who has made several guest appearances at Reformation. She serves on the personnel committee and when she's not lawyering for the federal government, Dina enjoys being outside, cooking, and dreaming of post-COVID travel.

March 26 ANDY WEAVER grew up in central Ohio, went to college in Unity, ME and ended up here in DC. Somewhere along the way he participated in the national jigsaw puzzle contest and helped build a small section of the Continental Divide Trail. Andy currently serves on Livestream team in addition to IT in his day job, which may be why his prayer reflected on daily irritations.

March 27 KAREN CARLSON has been a member of Reformation since 1991. She is married to Parry and she is Skye's mom.

March 28 JULIETTE JONES and her husband Marvin have been members of Reformation forever, and their four children were baptized and confirmed there. They have two grandchildren. They look forward to post-Covid fellowship at Reformation.

March 29 ELIZABETH WIRICK and her daughter Sarah Ral-

ston have been members of Reformation since 2018. Sarah has moved on to college and Elizabeth lives in Arlington with her husband John Ralston and their dog Charley and cat Crawford. Elizabeth enjoys reading others' FATE contributions more than writing her own, but tries to be useful.

March 30 EVAN SCHRAGE is a lawyer living and working in the NoMa neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Prior to moving to the District of Columbia, he lived in Chicago, IL, East Lansing, MI, and Phoenix, AZ. He has been a member of Lutheran Church of the Reformation since 2019.

March 31 BRIANNA WIDNER lives in the Capitol Hill neighborhood with her loving husband, Jake, and their sweet dog, Henderson. They've attended Reformation for the two years they've lived in D.C. Brianna is blessed to spend her working hours combatting the climate crisis through her work at The Climate Reality Project. She endeavors to spend as much of her non-work hours away from screens- immersed instead in God's creation (usually with her adventure buddy, Henderson, by her side!).

April 1 TED STEEGE served eight years as a pastor in Indiana and Wisconsin, then 10 years in Wisconsin and eight years on Capitol Hill as an advocate for justice for hungry children and their families. He now stirs up "good trouble" with the Synod's Racial Equity Team and with the Global Goals Team, doing education and advocacy for the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Most nights, he and Eva have supper in College Park, MD.

April 2 MOLLY HIGGINS joined Reformation four years ago and is part of the Thursday Night Bible Study and the Transition Team. Outside of church she is a librarian with the USDA. She spends her free time cooking and exercising.

April 3 AL SWINGLE, a member of the Reformation community of faith, is a retired pastor who lives on Capitol Hill with his wife Nancy.

April 4 GLORIA KENYON is a North Carolina native who has made the DC area her home for the last 15 years. She's married to Greg and they have a son, Ben, and a dog, Max. She

enjoys baking, cooking, and needlecrafts.

April 5 WAYNE KRUMWIEDE enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1946 at age 17. He married Grace Keller in 1958 while at the Embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. In 1966 received a Bachelor's degree in Business from the University of Maryland. He retired from the Air Force in 1968, then worked as a budget officer with the Coast Guard from 1970 to 1986 when he retired. Wayne has attended Reformation since 1999.

April 6 KIRI NICHOLSON resides in Arlington, VA with her cat Tillie the Tripod. On Sundays you can find her wrangling the 1st & 2nd graders with her good friends Mr. Will and Ms. Helene.

April 7 ALESIA FRERICHS and her husband Stephen Frerichs are long time members of the Church of the Reformation. Alesia serves as Vice President of Member Engagement at Lutheran Services in America where she has the honor and privilege of working with over 300 Lutheran Social Ministries from across the country.

April 8 EVAN BENOIT is a member of the Reformation choir. He sings the low notes.

April 9 MONICA FITZGERALD was one of seven children, so grew up learning that life isn't always fair (since most things come in boxes of six). After starting her career as a teacher she worked in Central America and later segued into work in federal IT. She is musical, athletic and extroverted. Her greatest joys are her marriage to Susanne, and being mom to Danny (14) and Benji (12).

April 10 EVITA LEONARD is the Executive Director of the Southeast Ministry. She believes that every person deserves dignity and respect no matter how they present themselves. In addition, she is the proud parent of two bright-eyed teenagers.

April 11 HELEN STAUDERMAN is a retired librarian who has lived on Capitol Hill since 2017, and enjoys seeing Sarah, Andrew, Frederic and Wilbur, occasionally.

April 12 CHRISTINE GOEPFERT is the Community Host at Reformation. She is very grateful and feels blessed to have the opportunity to support various ministries at the church. She is originally from Wisconsin, and moved to DC in 2015.

April 13 KATIE OSWEILER is an ordained Lutheran pastor serving at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Waterloo, Belgium. She misses the community at Reformation but is thankful for the friendships over the many miles. In her spare time, she likes to knit, go on walks in the woods and indulge in waffles, frites, and chocolate. She lives in Belgium with her husband Victor and kitty Lincoln.

April 14 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. He 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 chairs the Worship, Music and Arts Committee at Reformation.

April 15 CAITLIN JACOBS has been a member of Reformation for about 15 years. She coordinates worship leader volunteers, serves on the Worship, Music & the Arts Committee, and has served one term on Council. In normal times, she sings in the choir. Caitlin lives with her husband, Paul Staunton, and their cat Molly in Wheaton.

April 16 ROGER AND BEV DAHLIN give thanks for the blessings of a large family available to us mostly by air.

April 17 PASTOR RUSS GORDON is serving Reformation as Interim Pastor. He and his spouse, Jeanie, are from San Luis Obispo, California. They are thrilled to be living so close to their son, daughter in law, and grandchild who reside in Arlington.

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE REFORMATION

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