

St. Andrew's Hall

2024 Lenten Devotion Guide





St. Andrew's Hall

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*Cover Artwork by Matthew Hall
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Welcome from the Dean

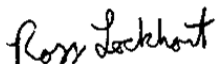
I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1: 4-6

Welcome to the 2024 Saint Andrew's Hall Lenten Devotion! We pray that this resource will be a tremendous blessing to you and your congregation as we journey towards Easter together. Philippians 1 proclaims that God has begun a good work in you, your congregation, and your neighbourhood is being shared widely as we grow in grace and strength in the Lord.

As you turn the pages of this year's St Andrew's Hall Lenten study guide, I pray that the daily reading of scripture and the thoughtful reflections from members of our community will strengthen and encourage you on the journey of discipleship. Feel free to share this guide with members of your family, church, and broader community. The practice of daily scripture reading and prayer is a key action for those of us apprenticed to Jesus, seeking to live as his hands and feet in the world. Our work and witness as disciples of the risen Lord Jesus is one that is best shared with others, for the journey is long and the road can be winding.

Even if you read this devotional booklet on your own, every time you access this resource, know that others across North America are reading these same words daily, praying these prayers, and reflecting on the goodness of God in our midst. During this season of Lent, Christians around the world set aside time to reflect on the significance of God sending Jesus to share life with us, to show us God's heart for this broken yet beautiful world. From the cradle at Christmas to the cross of Good Friday to the empty tomb of Easter Sunday, we sense the deep and world transforming action of God's reconciling and redeeming love for the world.

Thank you for joining with us at St. Andrew's Hall throughout this Lenten season in 2024. St. Andrew's Hall, as a college of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, has been a gospel witness on the University of British Columbia campus since 1955. The Lord has given us a vision that we are called to discern and equip the future church that God is bringing. As a result, St. Andrew's Hall educates and equips missional leaders through teaching, hospitality, and witness for Christ's church of tomorrow, today.



The Reverend **Ross A. Lockhart**, PhD,

Dean of St. Andrew's Hall

Ash Wednesday, February 14

Psalm 51:1-17

*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.*

Millions of Christians gather on Wednesday, February 14, to begin a season of reflection, prayer, and often fasting, to prepare for this year's encounter with the saving power of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Lent begins our preparation for this year's celebration of Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. The focus of these forty days of spiritual formation is upon forgiveness, cleansing, and renewal, enabled by God's Spirit present in our midst. Often, we turn to Psalm 51 to guide our Lenten practices. We invite David to lead us into the worshiping heart of the forgiven sinner: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions" (verse 1).

The Psalmist draws together the petitions in Psalm 51:1- 9 with the summarizing plea in verses 10-11: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy Spirit from me." This convicting and liberating Spirit guides the penance of the community, preparing it for the joyful witness of Easter and Pentecost. This annual encounter with the creative Spirit enables us to grow as witnesses to Christ whose praise will "teach transgressors your ways" (verse 13).

Creator God, Accept our sacrifice of Lenten contrition and "sustain in us a willing spirit."

(Read Psalm 51:1-17 every day during this year's observance of Lent.)

Darrell Guder is emeritus professor of missional and ecumenical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. He is Senior Fellow in Residence at St. Andrew's Hall.

Thursday, February 15

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

"We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known ... as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

Over time I've grown to appreciate paradox. I used to think matters were either black or white, but there are limitations in the conjunction "or." The word "and" is more generous and helps us comprehend that we can be grieving and grateful; tender and tough; knowledgeable and ignorant. Paradox is a gift.

In 2 Corinthians 6:8-10, Paul models how to embrace the spaciousness of "and" and not to live under the tyranny of "or." As participants in the reconciling work of God in Christ, we are true to our word and yet distrusted; we are immersed in tears and yet submerged in deep joy; overlooked by the world and yet seen by God.

In my early 30s, I felt misunderstood by others. A spiritual director observed that Christ, too, suffered in ways that people couldn't comprehend, and so perhaps my experience of being misunderstood was an invitation from God to grow in my identification with, and conformity to, Jesus.

Christ himself inhabits paradox. He is the sinless one, and he became sin for us; he is the one who was alienated, and he makes reconciliation with God possible for us; he is the one who was despised and rejected, and he is the one who is highly exalted and accepted by God.

This Lent, I invite you to find beauty and hope in our mysterious and paradoxical journey with God, increasing your trust in the One who, in love, willingly faced death, and who raises the dead.

Reconciling God, we don't want to receive your grace in vain. Help us to endure these trials with genuine love and patience, believing that you, Christ, both have walked this road before, and you are walking with us now. Amen.

Emily Mitchell is Associate Pastor of Congregational Care and Formation at Calvin Presbyterian Church in Shoreline, WA (just outside Seattle). In addition, she's a spiritual director with Renewal Ministries Northwest. She was honoured to be a St. Andrew's Hall Guder Scholar in 2022.

Friday, February 16

Isaiah 58:1-12

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

I remember I tried fasting at a very young age. It was back home in Indonesia, where the church I was part of invited all to pray and fast every Thursday, to humble ourselves before God and delivering our petition for getting a permit from government for our church building, which is hard to get in a predominantly Muslim country. So as a grade-5 boy, I remembered how I tried to let people know that I'm fasting to make sure they are not eating in front of me, for less temptation or just to show-off how faithful I am by doing such a religious action.

Reading Isaiah 58, we can see at the first half which captures how the people are displeased with the Lord's apparent lack of response. Because for them, fast is for "show." And with bitter irony comes their second question: "Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" And we all know that if there is humility in their questions, it is merely a thin veneer covering self-interest. Despite outward appearances, the way they are fasting is criticized for its insincere nature, as it seemingly seeks the Lord's favour while simultaneously oppressing the labourer, employee, and worker.

I got enlightenment from my parents after I fasted with the wrong attitude. The prophet Isaiah in a different context and time reminded his people that fasting, no matter how "good" it looks or how well it is done, if piety is turned inward and not accompanied by fair treatment of others, is empty. No matter how hard I suffered from restraining eating and drinking for 12 hours, I am finally aware that what was more important was what I did during that period and how I relied on God with my vulnerable body. At the same time, it reminded me of how a lot of people out there need to experience it not by choice.

Grant us the wisdom to understand that in this time of Lent, we need to humble ourselves before You, O Creator, Source of Light, and Protector, now and always. Amen.

Nehemia Neuhisa is a student at the Vancouver School of Theology/ St. Andrew's Hall, living at St. Andrew's Hall Residence, Vancouver. He is active in children and youth ministry as well as ministry in a Presbyterian nursing home/senior residence.

Saturday, February 17

Matthew 6:1-6. 16-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Lent is often a time of giving up things. Whether it is forgoing material goods, limiting the excesses of life, or practicing a minimal lifestyle, giving things up during Lent can help to remind us of where our treasures are and help us to refocus our heart's desires. Lent can also be a time of adding in things; adding more into our lives can also help us to see more clearly where we are storing up our treasures.

The practice of generosity is one way of adding more during lent. Adding almsgiving can be as simple as committing to saying yes when your generosity is requested. You can say yes when the self-checkout at the grocery store prompts you to *make a donation today*. You can say yes to the *give now!* requests that pepper your inbox. You can say yes to fundraising requests at school or work. Adding generosity does not have to be monetary, you can say yes when volunteers are needed.

Generosity is a flexible practice, you can commit to adding it every day during Lent, or you can add it one day a week. Adding generosity should be tailored to fit within your means and done in a way that ensures you feel safe. How you add this practice is between you and God. And that's what this passage is encouraging us to do - to add in more without trumpeting our virtue. For when we add more, we align our hearts with Jesus and will find where our treasures truly lie.

Lord, during this time of Lent may we refocus on the ways of Jesus – caring for the poor, lifting up those who are oppressed, ensuring the needs of others are met. Through quiet unassuming ways, may I place my treasure where my heart desires to be.

Andrea Perrett is an Associate in New Witnessing Communities with the Centre for Missional Leadership at St. Andrew's Hall.

First Sunday of Lent, February 18

Genesis 9: 8-17

“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you.”

“I will remember my covenant and the waters shall never again destroy.”
“Never again!” I have said that. I am going to get slim and trim. Next thing you know, I am watching tv eating chips. The world collectively said, “never again,” right after the Second World War. The UN pronounced prohibitions on the use of force, the illegality of genocide. Rash promises. Brash breaking of promises. I have a friend who says that what he is giving up for Lent is his New Year’s resolution. It takes a miracle to break out.

That is why promises we make in church are quickly followed by prayer.
“Without you, O God, no promise is sure . . .”

In Genesis, God promises “never again,” twice. The promise is that all things – the birds, domestic animals and every animal and the earth itself – will never fall into ruin again. And the promise is for future generations.

The call to participate in the healing of God’s world is ours to inhabit. If it is just about our resolve, God knows it will never be enough. God’s promise, “never again,” means that we get covenant in the place of chaos. God swears an oath in God’s own name. Puts a sign in the sky to remind himself. The “never again” rests squarely on God. It is a promise God keeps, even if it kills him.

Merciful God, your faithfulness knows no ends, and your grace is beyond measure through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We give thanks. Amen.

Richard Topping is President and Vice-Chancellor of the Vancouver School of Theology and holds the St Andrew’s Hall Chair in Reformed Studies.

Monday, February 19

Psalm 25:1-10

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.

In Psalm 25:1-10, David is speaking from a heart that seems filled with gratitude and wonder as he proclaims his trust and reliance is in God. He begins by lifting his soul to the Lord, recognizing his dependency upon God and placing his faith in the Almighty. He encapsulates that yearning for certainty, guidance and protection we all have as we journey through life.

Much like David, we often find ourselves at crossroads, uncertain of the paths laid before us. In these moments, we're invited to mirror David's posture—a humble surrender to God's will. David's prayer isn't just a request for direction; it's a declaration of trust. He acknowledges God's faithfulness in the past, recognizing that the Lord has always been a steadfast guide, leading with mercy and steadfast love.

As we try to keep pace with the demands that life presents us with, it is tempting to seek immediate answers or instant solutions, forgetting that some of the most meaningful journeys require patient steps guided by faith. This psalm reminds us that God's guidance is revealed to those who are willing to trust, wait, and seek His ways. It's a reminder that our reliance on God's wisdom and timing leads us to paths of righteousness and fulfillment.

As we navigate life's complexities, may we echo David's prayerful plea, trusting in God's faithfulness.

Prayer: Lord, show me your ways, teach me your paths, so that when the road ahead is unclear, I can move forward with confidence, knowing that I am guided by Your unfailing love and wisdom. In Jesus name I pray.

Shirley Carleton is a graduate of the Master of Divinity program at VST and a big fan of the staff and faculty of St. Andrew's Hall. She is an ordained minister with St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Amherstburg, Ontario.

Tuesday, February 20

1 Peter 3:18-22

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..."

When I was a kid, I used to love the rain. Playing in the rain on a warm summer day felt moviesque. Not long after, I entered a new phase of the marvels of mud. In grade 2, we learned about everything under the soil. That year, for the science fair, our project was to reflect our learning. I remember it clearly, I proudly brought in worms in an old yogurt container filled with dirt. Oh, it was marvelous. However, I didn't think of how dirty digging up dirt was going to be.

After mud play, when I got cleaned up, I always seemed to miss some dirt under my nails. When I think about water purification rites in the Old Testament, it was a temporary cleansing ritual, and you had to scrub extra hard or repeat this ritual to be spiritually cleansed.

Today, Peter points out the difference in baptism. Jesus appeals for us. Jesus redeems us from our own filth, dirt, and mud. And as we stand at the foot of the cross, His blood washes over us and we are made clean. Our sins are washed away. Our lives are shifted, transformed, and made in good appeal. We are cleansed because Jesus died and rose again. Friends, His grace extends to us. In our muddy situations, in our messy lives and in our sinful desires, Jesus appeals to God on our behalf. Jesus suffered for our sins, and now, we have a clean slate. This season, which areas of your life do you need to allow Jesus to wash over? Friends, Jesus extends this grace to you and me, and continues to extend it. May we not be ashamed of our identity in Christ and live lives of grace.

Lord, help us claim our identity in Baptism and share with others the hope that is within us, based on your grace and goodness. Amen.

Joe Ragbir grew up in Montreal and moved to Beautiful British Columbia in September 2022. He is currently pursuing his MDiv at VST. Joe has found joy in working in the youth ministry at Tenth Church and building deeper relationships within our SAH community. His passions/hobbies involve hanging out with friends, training at the gym, and playing board games.

Wednesday, February 21

Mark 1:9-15

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

Mark doesn't go into a lot of detail in this passage. He records the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit descending like a dove and then these beautiful words uttered by God from heaven. God calls Jesus, His Son but God doesn't stop there. God says that Jesus is beloved, and that God is pleased with him. Why was God pleased with him? Was it because Jesus was baptized by John or was it a statement of encouragement that would stay with Jesus as he went through the wilderness and time of testing. Would those words along with the Holy Spirit strengthen him on his journey and the completion of his purpose? I think so. Jesus was able to resist Satan and come out the other side proclaiming the gospel of God.

Once again, Mark doesn't include many details pertaining to the wilderness period that followed, or the specific temptations Jesus faced except to say that it would last for forty days, that there were wild animals and that the angels looked after him. So, what about our wilderness periods? According to this passage, they last for a certain length of time. There is a beginning and end. Also, we will have help getting through them. But what really stands out for me is that if we know for certain that we are on the path of God's will and purpose for our lives, then we can also know without a doubt that God loves us as God's children. God will be with us and take care of us as we go through such times. If we could only remember those encouraging words that God spoke to Jesus before his ministry began and know that we also have the Holy Spirit with us, then the wilderness becomes a good thing... a time of dependence on God and a time of growth as we pass each test presented to us. But even if we don't pass every test, we've heard those beautiful words from God beforehand and can be reassured that God's love for us never changes, no matter what! Praise God!

Loving and merciful God, we thank you for being with us and attending to us as we walk through our times of wilderness. Help us to remember your words of love and encouragement as we do your will and purpose for our lives. Amen.

Patricia St. James Smith is a student at VST working on her M.Div. She lives in the Garden of Eden in Nova Scotia and wears many hats including pulpit supply at a nearby Presbyterian Church, as well as a part-time clinical dietitian in a long-term care facility.

Thursday, February 22

Isaiah 42: 1-9

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight."*

As this passage describes a servant of God and a list of what God promises, from beginning till end, each sentence is written in absolutes; in what *will* happen.

This passage is drenched in God's authority and assurance. It carries the confidence of the sun rising each morning after going down to set each night.

In holding such powerful authority over anything we've ever known; we are blessed to be under the rulership of a King who cares for every heartache and tribulation of His people.

Our God hears the quietest whimper of each heart, and He will stop at nothing to see that we are healed, unbound, and seen.

In the passage before us today in this SAH Lenten Guide, before all that is promised, the Lord begins by holding out His servant, His deliberately chosen one, and makes it so clear and known the treasure this servant is to Him.

Will I remember His call on my name, His dearness of me, and what He has promised?

Lord, may my mind be sober, heart be hopeful, and spirit remain in You. Amen.

Nuri Lee studies Theology and Culture at St. Mark's College. A member of the Presbyterian Church in Canada from Ontario, she is a resident of St Andrew's Hall and regular participant in Tuesday chapel. She has a wide range of hobbies and collections but that does not stop her from finding more.

Friday, February 23

Mark 9:2-9 (ESV)

⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

I remember an episode of the cartoon *Arthur* in which a character assumed their teacher lived at school and was very surprised to discover they had lives just like everyone else. It was a jarring experience for the student because they never considered the teacher's identity beyond the school walls.

When reading Mark 9:2-9, this came to mind. Maybe because I am currently studying to be a teacher, or perhaps because Peter calls Jesus "Rabbi", but regardless it could be a helpful way to relate to the astonishment of Peter, James, and John.

Moses and Elijah were two of the most significant figures in Judaism. If I had only ever known Jesus as my teacher, the personable man with time for individuals, suddenly seeing Him among some of the most important and respected people in biblical history would be a big shock.

As we experience Lent, we know to anticipate the magnitude of the cross and the wonder of His resurrection, but the disciples had yet to recognize this part of Christ, even as God explicitly told them of His Son's identity many times. I encourage you to ponder which parts of Jesus' multifaceted identity you recognize most often, and then go deeper, noticing and appreciating the aspects of Him you might not always see.

Father God, thank you for sending your Son – the teacher, the healer, the fulfiller of promises, the willing servant, the unblemished sacrificial lamb – to be countless things for us all at once.

Mackenzie Wallace is a UBC student living at St. Andrew's Hall, enjoying the campus and community until she finishes her Bachelor of Education this summer. She is a member of Coquitlam Presbyterian Church and has served on the staff team at Camp Douglas.

Saturday, February 24

Romans 4:13-25

“As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.”

The Father of Us All

The three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are sometimes called the “Abrahamic faiths.” In one way or another, we are all descended from old Abraham. To him there came a promise, that God would bless him with a son and make him the “father of many nations.” Judaism can claim family descent from Abraham and I do not know precisely how Muslims describe their relationship to Abraham, “the father of us all.” But I can say that we Christians are related to Abraham not through physical descent or even by observing the law of God, but rather, through faith.

According to the story, Abraham was an old man and, more importantly, his wife Sarah was old and withered also. (They would make the average age of membership in many of our churches seem young by comparison!) The promise seemed somewhere between extremely unlikely and impossible.

But Abraham believed the promise, or, more precisely, put his trust in the One who made the promise, “being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” So Abraham put on his sandals and started walking toward what we call, even in these troubled times, the Promised Land.

But the God of Abraham, who is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ specializes in the unlikely and impossible. We are children of Abraham and God has made many promises to us and to the Church. To be honest, many of those promises seem unlikely or even impossible. Almost as impossible as bringing the Lord Jesus back to life.

So, name the promises.

Trust in the One who made those promises.

And put on your sandals and get walking.

Father, thank you for your promises to us as children of God. Help us to trust in your grace and goodness at work in the world – healing and holding all in your care. Amen.

Stephen Farris is Dean Emeritus of St. Andrew’s Hall and Professor Emeritus of Homiletics at VST

Second Sunday of Lent, February 25

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

“I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.”

In today’s passage, Abram has already been waiting twenty-four years since his initial encounter with God when God promises to make him into a great nation. Now at ninety-nine years of age, Abram encounters God once again and the promise, the covenant, is repeated. God changes Abram’s name from “exalted father” to Abraham, “father of a multitude.” However, the promise becomes even grander this time.

God’s promise to barren Abraham and Sarah is greater than their wildest dreams. God says to Abraham, “I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you” (v. 6b). This is the first mention that not only will Abraham be the ancestor of a multitude of nations but that his line will become one of kings. God’s renaming of Sarai to the modernized version “Sarah” emphasizes her name’s meaning of “princess.” Indeed, “kings of peoples shall come from her” (v. 16b), from this “princess.”

Abraham waited twenty-five years to see the fruit of one of God’s promises to him - his son, Isaac. Only generations later does Abraham’s descendant, David, become king over Israel; and even more generations later, the Messiah is born as the King of all kings.

What can we use as reminders of how God has been and is currently, actively working toward our good? In what ways can we, as individuals and as churches, step out in faith, knowing God dreams bigger for us than we even dare to dream?

Holy God, grant us grace and peace when waiting on you is difficult; and inspire and empower us by your Spirit to not only dream big for your Kingdom but to step out boldly in faith in following your call upon us. Amen.

Elaine Wilson co-pastors at St. Giles’ Presbyterian Church in Prince George, BC. She is a St. Andrew’s Hall/VST alumus and currently serves on the Board of St. Andrew’s Hall.

Monday, February 26

Psalm 19

“The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.”

Notwithstanding music videos and YouTube or Tiktok clips, we absorb a lot of information through the written word. After all, you have picked up this devotional with some expectation of something new to ponder.

Reflect for a moment: what has been the best book you've read in the past six months? What did you learn? Why was it so enjoyable? Did it change your life in any way?

How about the reading you do for work? Any of it inspiring? Surely, intriguing or challenging?

As a bit of a governance nerd, I find myself reading By-Laws and policies. Trust me, this can be fun if you know the organization to which they pertain. You can learn a lot about the principles and priorities of the entity but sadly, not much about its values or soul. It's like reading fiction and remembering only the plot but forgetting the character development and underlying themes.

Not so with God since his handbook promises amazing benefits. Reading the scriptures- and acting on what you read- brings refreshment, wisdom, light and even joy. Surely as we journey toward Easter and are aware of our need to follow Jesus more faithfully, this is good news. But the good news is not only the gift of God's holy word, but the God scripture reveals. The God whose commands are perfect, trustworthy, right, and radiant. The God, incarnate in Jesus, who loves us and forgives us and calls us ever closer.

Jesus, help me to come to know you more fully through your word: may your commands penetrate my heart and be expressed more readily in my daily living. Amen.

Mary Rozsa de Coquet is an Elder at Grace Presbyterian Church, Calgary, Alberta, and a Board member at St. Andrew's Hall.

Tuesday, February 27

Exodus 20:1-17

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

Moses walks down Sinai carrying 2 stone tablets with the 10 commandments written on them. Have you ever wondered why God gave Moses two tablets?

Some people think that God ran out of space on the first tablet, so he kept writing onto a second one. They picture in their mind, 5 commandments on 1 tablet, and 5 on the other. Others, however, think that the commandments were split 4 and 6. After all, the first 4 commandments deal with our vertical relationship with God, and the next 6 deal with our horizontal relationships with each other. And so, the first 4 commandments were written on one tablet, and the last 6 on the other.

However, we must remember that the 10 commandments come as a result of our covenant with God. Thus, I think that the first tablet had all 10 commandments written on it, and the second tablet had all 10 commandments written on it too. Two copies to mark and be witnesses to this covenant. One tablet for Israel. One tablet for God.

It's like how wedding rings work. I have a wedding ring. My wife has a wedding ring. Every time I look at my ring, it reminds me that I'm married. I made vows. I belong to someone else. That's why there are two tablets. Israel was given a ring. A tablet that could be read publicly to remind them of who they belonged to! Israel had one copy, and the other copy belonged to God. Since God lived in the tabernacle, both copies were kept together in the Ark of the Covenant.

Does this not change the way we look at the 10 commandments? They are not to be thought of as rules to constrain us, but instead they are to be thought of as a wedding gift! In the Hebrew language and among Jews, the 10 commandments are simply known as the "10 words." Ten words that help grow, enhance and protect our relationship with God!

God, thank you for the words of the 10 Commandments. May we relish in our covenantal relationship with you. Amen.

Albert YS Chu is the Director of the Center for Missional Leadership. He is also the Lead Pastor of the Tapestry Church.

Wednesday, February 28

Psalm 22:23-31

“My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation.”

This is the second part of Psalm 22. In the first part, verses 1-22, the psalmist describes his struggle and calls for divine help. Now, he includes the entire community in his praise of gratitude for the deliverance that was given.

What once seemed like the absence of the Lord now turns into a song of celebration for God’s help. Then this song goes further, as it becomes a testimony of the help coming from the hand of God. The one who suffered alone now affirms that God does not abandon and ensures that everyone hears this message.

The composer of this psalm suffered alone, but the victory granted was shared with everyone, just as Jesus suffered alone, but the victory over death was shared with everyone.

God's saving action in this psalm is guaranteed to everyone: poor, rich, nations and generations. We can, in this time of Lent, reflect on how Jesus' death includes people we will never even know.

Being God-fearing does not exempt us from suffering. Jesus, God the Son, suffered. The difference is that we fear a God who not only accompanies us in our suffering, but who has also suffered the worst in our place.

Dear God, we believe that you hold our hand and guide us in our struggles. Therefore, we will sing about your greatness and your deliverance. Amen.

Lucas Bruder de Oliveira is a minister of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil and currently serving at St. John’s Presbyterian Church in White Rock. Lucas is a Master of Theology (ThM) student at Vancouver School of Theology and an active participant at St. Andrew’s Hall.

Thursday, February 29

Matthew 17:1-9

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

Growing up in Winnipeg, my friends and I would often gather on weekends to watch professional sports on television, after full days of our own sporting adventures in the neighbourhood. Often, we would watch hockey or baseball on “The Sports Network” TSN. TSN had something they would always do at the end of broadcast called “the TSN turning point.” This was the moment in the game where the sportscaster felt there was a definitive shift – maybe a key goal or home run, sometimes it was a defensive play like an incredible save or a sliding catch in the outfield. Today’s text is most certainly a TSN turning point in Lent.

After Peter’s declaration of Jesus as Messiah at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus takes a handful of his disciples up the mountain behind what is now called Banias in Israel – likely Mt. Hermon. As they climb higher the disciples could never have imagined what happened next. There on the mountainside, the whole area is filled with light, and they see their Rabbi speaking with Moses and Elijah – the two great heroes of their faith representing the Law and the Prophets. As children, if the disciples collected Bible Hero action cards (like we used to collect Hockey cards) the Moses and Elijah cards would be two of the most valuable to hold onto! And here they were, all together. The disciples long to hold onto this moment too. But all at once, things get even more amazing – a theophany takes place – God the Father speaks! Just like at Jesus baptism, God the Father declares Jesus to be his beloved. With this confirmation of Jesus’ identity, he leads the disciples down the mountain and “sets his face towards Jerusalem.” This is the TSN turning point. From now on, every step Jesus takes will be towards Golgotha. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, to Holy Week, to fulfilling the Father’s mission as his Beloved.

What have been the “TSN turning points” in your own life of faith? When have you experienced that significant, even dramatic, encounter with God that reminds you of your baptismal identity as a beloved child of God? How might this Lenten season be another turning point in your life of discipleship?

Thank you, Lord, for the moments in our journey of faith where we remember your active, saving and transforming presence in our lives. May we live in anticipation of your revelation this very day. Amen.

Ross Lockhart is Dean of St. Andrew’s Hall.

Friday, March 1

Hebrews 10:4-10

“And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

For several years I volunteered at my children’s school, helping grade one students who were struggling with reading. A student and I would go into the hall, make words with tiles, review a worksheet, and then read a book together.

Sometimes if I was lucky, I was present at the very moment when reading “clicked” for them. But mostly, we struggled along, the students often reluctant, putting letters together to make words, and words together to make sentences. But it was the time of the week when I knew I was doing God’s will.

Sometimes we think that following Jesus requires great sacrifices or dramatic evangelism (and sometimes it does), but mostly, following Jesus means saying, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.”

It is seeing a need before you, and then saying yes to the invitation to serve. For me, that meant volunteering in the classroom. For someone else, it might be showing up once a month at the food bank, or driving a senior to church, or hosting a conversation circle for new Canadians, or inviting an international student over for lunch after church.

It is the quiet everyday actions, one after another, where we are made holy.

O God – help us to be open to your call, in the ordinary and everyday moment of life. May we answer your call and do your will. Amen.

The Rev. Theresa McDonald-Lee is the co- Executive Director at Camp Kintail, the Presbyterian camp in southwestern Ontario. She is a graduate of VST and was glad to be the 2023 Pastor-In-Residence at St. Andrew’s Hall.

Saturday, March 2

Luke 1:37-38

“For nothing will be impossible with God.”³⁸ Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.”

In the story of the Annunciation, Mary declares herself to be “the servant of the Lord” and bravely accepts God’s will in difficult times. It is a fine example of faith, love, obedience, and humility.

We see here a universal nature to Luke’s Gospel. Women take an equal place with men in God’s plan. God moves through the young and old, rich and poor. No one is left out. This Gospel and this Saviour are for our whole world. In Luke, Mary is there as *one of us*. The power of her story is not how special she was, but how great God’s grace is. It speaks to the power of God and how God can use this power in our lives. It doesn’t matter what condition we find ourselves in, because having Jesus in our lives means having a steadfast hope that God has an immense love for us.

Mary shows us how we can respond to God’s surprises that we might have in our own lives. Even though God turned Mary’s life upside down, she still offered herself to God. When we place our faith in Jesus and let him come and live within us, just like Mary let the Holy Spirit work within her, the Holy Spirit will come upon us, and the life of Jesus is born within us.

During this season of Lent, we can resolve to change our lives with the certainty that Jesus will never come down off the cross. He never leaves us because of the immense love he has for us. Even if like Mary, we may be going through a difficult time in our lives, we are still in the centre of God’s plan.

Thank you, God, for giving us this day. Each day is a new opportunity for us to follow you, and to fill ourselves with your love, kindness, and mercy. Amen.

David Coull is a SAH/VST graduate who is now serving in his first call as Minister at Bethel Presbyterian Church, Sydney, Nova Scotia.

Third Sunday of Lent, March 3

Exodus 17:1-7

*Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me?
Why do you put the Lord to the test?"*

Complaining is a part of life. I used to live and work at a summer camp, and we had what was called "Filter Free Friday." It was a chance for people living in community to voice things that upset them, and it acted like a vent to keep pent up frustration from building. Often the complaints were getting at deeper issues.

For example, a complaint might be, "People are leaving a mess in the kitchen at night." What the person was really saying was, "People like a snack before bed but, when you leave a mess, it is rude and disrespectful to the kitchen staff." Sometimes it is difficult to see below the surface words to get to the root of a problem.

When we come to the complaint in Exodus we read "*But the people thirsted for water; and the people complained against Moses...*" That is a straightforward complaint—people need water to live, and they currently do not have any. However, it also points to something deeper. Another way to say it might be, "We have left our lives behind, we do not know where we are going or, if we will survive."

When their needs are met, the Israelites feel that God is there, and when they are hungry and thirsty it feels like God has abandoned them. The challenge for them was trusting God when things felt uncertain.

We likely understand those feelings. When difficult things come either in our lives, or our churches we might feel alone or abandoned. We might complain, "We don't have enough money, volunteers etc." What we are really saying is, "the future is unclear, and unknowns are scary." That is an honest complaint. However, God reminds us to trust, even if all we see ahead are stones, because God knows where there is water.

*Loving God, help us to trust you and to follow your call in our lives. Help us to see the water you have placed in our lives, especially when we are afraid.
Amen.*

Rev. Amanda Henderson Bolton served as a 2023 Guder Scholar at St. Andrew's Hall and is the minister of the Kirk of St James in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island where she lives with her husband, and their two children.

Monday, March 4

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.*

It's easy to read a passage like this and think of it as a mere historical anecdote, with little relevance to one's current personal situation. Rarely do we feel the grip of the foe grabbing us or fall to our knees in despair at the brink of destruction.

Compared to other times and places, most of us enjoy comfortable and easy lives. We live in a secular world and have been influenced by that. We find safety and security in stable finances, good grades and successful employment, thinking we are simply reaping the benefits of our very own accomplishments, failing all too often to recognize that all the good we have, we have received from the Lord (James 1:17.)

What rebellious fools we are! How afflicted we are by Sin, how close we are to the gates of death. We are no different than the people described in today's verses. We too were scattered away from His kingdom and have been gathered into it by His grace and mercy. We too were rescued from the grave, and we all have a story worth telling –how God, in His steadfast love, saved us and continues to bless us with forgiveness and daily bread in abundance.

May this season of Lent help us reflect on our great need for a Saviour, so our hearts are filled with true joy when we proclaim His wonderful deeds in songs of praise at Easter, the happy celebration of God's love for the whole world. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

God, help us to recognize your steadfast love in all aspects of our lives. Amen.

Silva Kraal is a Community Coordinator at SAH. She remains a firm Lutheran despite occasionally donning a John Calvin shirt at community events.

Tuesday, March 5

Ephesians 2:1-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

In my academic background in Korea, the final sentence of a paragraph is often the key, encapsulating the core message the author intends to convey.

However, during my studies in Canada, I came to realize that the opening sentence holds importance. It usually serves as a definitive statement of the author's stance. Just as in this writing system, the inaugural verse of the book of Ephesians chapter 2 carries the author's unmistakable voice and assertion.

The opening verse of the text declares, "You were dead." At first glance, I questioned whether this could truly be the focal point of the passage, as death isn't always the conclusion in Christian teachings. Yet, I recognized that this statement serves as the conclusion, signaled by the word "were."

Indeed, we were once dead, but now we live in the grace of Christ. Though our past may have been marred by various negative aspects such as sins, disobedience, and the influence of the devil, it's not crucial because it's behind us.

We now live as children of God, embraced by the grace, love, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Lord. It's crucial to remember that in the grace of Jesus Christ, death is merely a past chapter, and a new life permanently resides within us.

God, we pray that you might help us believe that death is not the conclusion of our lives, but rather, by grace, the beginning of new life is in us. Amen.

Chanil Lee is an associate pastor at Disciple Methodist Church. Chanil lives with his family at St. Andrew's Hall while enrolled in the VST/Durham Ph.D. program, majoring in Homiletics.

Wednesday, March 6

John 3:14-21

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

Nicodemus arranged to meet Jesus at night, hoping to find out in secret who Jesus was. Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council, a Pharisee, and an esteemed scholar widely respected as Israel's teacher. When they met, Jesus ignored the flattering remarks offered by Nicodemus but declared that no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are “born again”. Nicodemus was taken aback by that unexpected comment and countered intellectually that it was an absurd idea. How can a grown man go back into his mother's womb. He simply did not get it. Jesus explained further, with reference to being born of water and the Spirit. Nicodemus remained unconvinced. Nor it seems did he understand Jesus' prophetic remark that the Son of Man needed to be lifted up to save humankind, like Moses' bronze snake on a pole.

But John the disciple, a fisherman, likely overheard the conversation, and in a “hallelujah” moment, got it! He subsequently penned the two most important sentences in human history. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world, to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

During this time of Lent let us let go of the worldly things that encumber us from seeing the eternal truth, let us look to the Son on the cross, and let us hear these two most beautiful sentences with our heart.

Thank you, Lord, for leading us to your truth and light. Amen

Victor Ling is an elder and a cancer researcher. He serves on the Board of Saint Andrew's Hall.

Thursday, March 7

1 Peter 4:1-8

“Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.”

Not many of us enjoy opening up our Bibles and immediately being faced with the topic of suffering. But these words in 1 Peter are guiding us to think about a specific kind of suffering—the kind of suffering where we are harassed or bullied for choosing a life in Christ.

Jesus said to the adulterous woman in John 8:11, “Go now and leave your life of sin.” Christ calls us to enter into a new way of being as citizens of His new kingdom, initiated by Him through His suffering on the cross. Through His death and resurrection, we are new creations. Born again. Re-imaged. Given a blank slate.

And when we live into these realities, others will be surprised by how we live. Perhaps they’ll be intrigued; but others will undoubtedly be confused, uncomfortable, or even hateful of our ‘new life.’

Don’t worry about them, says Peter. Don’t fixate on how they’re living. Don’t focus on what they’re saying.

Look at Jesus. Put on His attitude. Because then, as Eugene Peterson wrote in the Message translation, “you’ll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.”

We all fall into the temptation of wanting to be liked, to be popular, to be appreciated. But as it turns out, this doesn’t give us the kind of life that Peter is talking about.

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,” wrote the hymnist. “Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.”

Living God, enable us to live by your Spirit rather than by our own desires, and grant us the courage to face obstacles and hostility in our lives with a posture of grace and love. Amen.

Jenna Fabiano served as a 2023 Guder Scholar at St. Andrew’s Hall and is the Lead Pastor at Willoughby Christian Reformed Church in Langley, BC. She lives in Coquitlam with her husband Danny, 1-year old son Malakai, and goldendoodle Kamba.

Friday, March 8

Isaiah 60: 1-3

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you."

Last May I had the privilege of leading thirty-five Presbyterians from Nova Scotia to British Columbia on a pilgrimage through Egypt and Israel. Just months before the region descended into the darkness of war and violence, we journeyed through the land where so many of our Old and New Testament stories took place. A highlight for me was visiting St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai desert (the oldest continuously occupied monastery in the world) and staying in the guest house.

As planned, there was a knock after midnight on our door. We wandered out into the darkness of night, with the stars shimmering above. Walking out past the fortified monastery gates, we saw camels assembled and waiting. Climbing on, (always an adventure!) we began our slow climb in the darkness up the path to the summit of Mount Sinai. I could not see the path below and had to trust that the camel knew where it was going! I began to think of Sunday School memories of this place, Moses camped below with the people of Israel, and heading up this sacred mountain to share communion with God. By the time we reach the top and climbed the rest of the way to the summit on foot, the wind was howling, and we took shelter for a time in a Bedouin hut, enjoying strong coffee and good companionship.

When the sunrise was just minutes away, we left the shelter and climbed the final steps to the summit. There, the wind whipping our faces, we watched in awe as the first light of dawn appeared. A light in the darkness. As the whole desert valley filled with light in the minutes that followed, a deep hush and reverence fell over the crowd at the top. This sacred place once more offered up a gift of God's revelation. What followed was over two hours of a slow descent from the mountain on foot, soaking up the incredible views and spending time in prayer and contemplation.

In many ways, the Lenten journey is one of moving from darkness to light as well. We begin in the heart of winter and watch as the days get longer. We follow Jesus from the Mount of Transfiguration as he sets his face towards Jerusalem. We experience the darkness of Good Friday and await, with anticipation and faith, the brilliant light of the resurrection morn. How will you experience the light and love of Christ anew in this dark world today and in this Lenten Season?

God of revelation, speak to us of your grace and goodness as you did with Moses on Sinai long ago. Help us to hear and see you at work in our lives, calling us into covenant relationship with you and all creation. Amen.

Ross Lockhart is Dean of St. Andrew's Hall.

Saturday, March 9

Hebrews 9:11-15

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”

I can't imagine living in ancient times and having to make physical animal sacrifices at the altar for my own personal mistakes and transgressions. I don't know about you, but if I had to bring animals to a tabernacle and priest to offer to God on my behalf, I wouldn't even know how to begin to find the time, let alone the resources to accomplish such tasks.

As I ponder how the Hebrew people lived those rituals, I certainly give thanks. Yet these ancient offerings and sacrifices pointed us to the perfect and final sacrifice of Christ. A sacrifice made once and for all.

I then turn my attention inward. These sacrifices and rituals of ancient times allowed people to be cleansed, but verse 13 indicates that it was an outward cleansing: it is my heart that God is after. My outward appearance may be cleansed, but it is the work of Christ that allows my heart to be cleansed, and ultimately freed.

Thank goodness for our Saviour who was and is our perfect sacrifice so that we can be truly cleansed – inside and out. The sacrifice of Christ truly accomplished what other sacrifices could not. Praise be to our God indeed!

As we continue to journey in this Lenten Season, may our hearts truly be cleansed as we contemplate the true sacrifice offered not by the blood of goats and calves and animals, but the blood of Christ – the blood that was shed for us all.

Loving God, we give you thanks for Blood of Christ, the only blood needed to truly cleanse and atone for the sins and mistakes we've made. Amen.

Rev. Janice Doyle serves the faith family of Caledonia Presbyterian Church in Caledonia, just south of Hamilton, ON. Janice and her congregation are participating in the Centre for Missional Leadership's (CML) Missional Certificate Program.

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 10

Psalm 51:1-12

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Psalm 51 situates this prayer of confession in that dramatic moment in David's life when Nathan the Prophet tells a story that subversively exposes David's sin with Bathsheba. The story is about a poor man who owned only one lamb, a lamb who was “like a daughter to him.” When a rich man, who owned a multitude of sheep, desired to serve a feast to a traveler, he confiscated the lamb from the poor man. Upon hearing the story, David was irate, demanding that this greedy rich man be brought before him and killed. Then Nathan utters those words that stuck in David's heart like a sword: “You are the man”.

When our wrongdoing is exposed in such a blatant fashion, our response can take various routes. We can fight back, blaming others. We can ignore, obfuscate, or deny our wrongdoing. Or we can choose to confess our wrongdoing, take accountability for our actions, seek restoration, and ask God to help us amend our ways. In this situation (but certainly not in all the wrong done in his life), David chose the latter route. And this poem/prayer in Psalm 51 has become a prayer that has been uttered by countless Jews and Christians since, expressing the words we may have otherwise fumbled for when our own wrongdoings have been exposed.

I have turned to these words of Psalm 51 often. What else can we do when our wrongdoing is exposed if we hope to live more fully human lives, than to confess, as openly and humbly as David does here. “Have mercy on me, O God according to your unfailing love”... “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me”... “Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow”. These phrases have guided me in my confession over my lifetime. Verse 10 leads us to embrace a key element of a confession that leads to repentance – and transformation: “Create in me a pure heart”. A millennium or so after Nathan's confrontation with David, Jesus picked up this phrase and added a new dimension to it. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

In our society obsessed with appearances (akin to how many leaders in Jesus' day were concerned with external purity), David's prayer and Jesus' words invite us to something very different. *They invite us to build a correspondence between our desires, convictions, motivations and actions.* Such re-integration is what David longed for. Such reintegration is what I need. Such reintegration is key for each of us to become more human and to “see” God.

Prayer: Create in me a clean heart O God, that my life may be a reflection of yours. Amen.

Tim Dickau is an associate at the Center for Missional Leadership, the Director of Citygate, and the author of *Forming Christian Communities in a Secular Age*.

Monday, March 11

Psalm 23

The Divine Shepherd

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”

There is beauty and simplicity in this beloved Psalm. It reads like a peaceful poem that settles one’s soul. It conveys a timeless message we can rest within as we trust in God’s faithfulness and provision. Sometimes I recite this psalm to myself when I’m feeling vulnerable and anxious. Maybe you have prayed it in times of calm and crisis. I remember reciting it in community during times of grief when my parents and dear friends died. I memorized this psalm as a child, and I have never grown tired of it.

The psalmist affirms the divine shepherd’s abiding presence and protection in the face of fear, the unknown, and long dark nights; the shepherd brought him comfort. And when we, in our worst moments, feel we are alone in our suffering, we can call out to the One who walks alongside us ... so our fears will diminish, and our courage will grow. In the journey of life, we all experience dark valleys and sit at tables where our enemies are in view. There is no avoiding them, but our divine shepherd (Hebrews 13:20) will never abandon us. Quite the opposite. The goodness and mercy of God chases us down all the days of our lives and guides us through our troubles to the other side. At times, you may not want to receive such grace (“I’m unworthy of it,” “I deserve to be punished,” “I’m comfortable being miserable and I fear change”), but the unrelenting love of God will keep pursuing you, calling you back to live in the place where God dwells, where there is righteousness, peace, and joy.

Where in your life do you need the divine shepherd’s guidance, rest, or pursuing love?

inhale: The Lord is my shepherd. inhale: I am not afraid.
exhale: I have everything I need. exhale: You comfort me.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise (St. Patrick). Thanks be to God. Amen.

Rev. Sumarme Goble is the Chaplain and Community Life Director at St. Andrew’s Hall.

Tuesday, March 12

Psalm 119:9-16

"I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."

I have a friend who has an amazing memory. She can quote scripture and verse on the fly like a copy of Strong's Concordance. My memory in general, and for scripture specifically, often leaves me wanting. It's a good thing I have Google.

But Google aside, there are a few verses that just stick with me. "He has shown thee, O man. What is good and what the Lord requires of thee." "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil." "Fear not, for I bring tidings of great joy that shall be for all the people." "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind." These are verses that come to mind most easily when I need them.

And then there is this verse from Psalm 119 - "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." This is a verse that, no matter my situation, always comes back to me. When I get cut off by another driver. When someone I trust lets me down. When a stranger does something disappointing. When I am angry, jealous, envious, or otherwise sin against someone or against God. Unbidden, these words come to mind – I have hidden your word in my heart. Deeply buried, but so much a part of me. Intrinsic to my being. I don't remember all the laws, all the commandments, all the decrees listed in the bible in detail. But my heart reminds me of this verse.

And that is what His Word does. It reminds us of His promises, His strength, and His glory. As we face our daily struggles, temptations, challenges and problems, God has given us His Word. He has given us His promise. We can know this deeply in our hearts and be assured that He is always with us. Let us hide his Word in our hearts and let us delight in His promises.

Lord, we rejoice in your promises, that we hold deep in our hearts. Help us to not forget your Word and stay focused on you and your ways. In Jesus name, Amen.

Neil Singh is the Assistant (to the) Regional Manager of UrbanPromise International, and an independent consulting engineer. He serves on the Board of Saint Andrew's Hall, and is an elder at City Centre Church, Surrey, BC.

Wednesday, March 13

John 9:1-41

“Though I was blind, now I see.”

Today’s passage recounts highly dramatic scenes beginning with Jesus’ healing of a blind man on the Sabbath. After rigorous questioning by the religious authorities, the healed man is cast out of the community for claiming that Jesus is from God. Jesus then seeks out the man, who recognizes him as the Son of Man and worships him. The drama ends with Jesus’ rebuke to the Pharisees, accusing them of spiritual blindness.

Who are we in this story? The blind one given sight who testifies again and again to Jesus’ miracle? The bystanders watching events unfold, unsure of what to think? The man’s parents, too afraid to speak the truth that Jesus healed their son? The religious leaders, secure in their authority, who bully and refuse to open their eyes?

This Lenten season invites us to look within and consider these themes of blindness, arrogance, fear, healing, and the loving claim of Jesus upon us. As individuals and as faith communities, how are we blind to what and whom we should truly see? In our arrogance or complacency, how often do we miss the presence of Jesus among us?

Jesus’ act of healing transformed this man – both his sight *and* his spirit. This is our story too. Jesus seeks us out, heals our deepest hurts, and restores all to wholeness. Thanks be to God!

Jesus, Light of the World, open our eyes and make us your disciples. We long to see you. Amen.

Mary Jesse worships at First Presbyterian Church, Regina and is a member of the St. Andrew’s Hall Board.

Thursday, March 14

Hebrews 5: 5-10

You are a priest forever; according to the order of Melchizedek.

Following my first full read through of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, one of the (many) questions I came away stumbling over was this mysterious Melchizedek fellow. Melchizedek only shows up a few times in Scripture (Genesis 14, Psalm 110, and throughout Hebrews) but he nevertheless makes his presence felt.

According to my 1962 Interpreter's Dictionary, "Melchizedek" is part historical Canaanite king and part Canaanite-language importation. Following this word's eventual successful transplant into Israelite culture, Melchizedek entered its final form: a mystery-laden shorthand for the Israel's priestly class. Much like my dictionary, Melchizedek reminds us that he has spent time in other people's libraries; among other people's books and precious things.

Why does the author of Hebrews choose this obscure title to refer to Christ so emphatically and so often throughout the letter?

The answer begins in the first verse of the pericope: "*Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed...*" (Heb 5:5)

How did Christ become appointed to the office of high priest for all humanity, voluntarily save that same humanity on the cross, and yet remain humble during the process? Through reverent submission.

Just as the true priest points not to himself but to the one he serves, Christ, through reverent submission to God, emptied himself of life in order to become filled with eternal life, not for his own sake but for ours.

His perfected priesthood has a name, one known and reserved for him from the beginning: Melchizedek.

God Our Father, help us to come openly and faithfully to our only high priest this day, to receive His eternal blessings. Amen.

Rev. Roberto DeSandoli is a graduate of VST, a former resident of St. Andrew's Hall, a 2023 Guder Scholar at SAH and Minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon.

Friday, March 15

1 Corinthians 1: 18-31

*“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*

It seems, does it not, that some things don't change! What was true in Old Testament times was similarly true in Paul's day and is also true today — humanity is drawn to its own 'wisdom', abandoning the true wisdom of God for a 'wisdom' that cannot help, transform, or save.

For Paul preaching in Corinth, the Gospel of Christ was being met with scepticism and ridicule. A crucified Saviour didn't make sense! The Jew's were scandalized at the very notion and the Gentiles demanded rhetorical argument; both were looking for 'proof'.

Today, the world is similarly sceptical! TikTok and other social media platforms are awash with voices casting doubt, demanding evidence, and offering alternate viewpoints and understandings. The wisdom of God, however, cuts through this dissonant noise and worldly chatter with the good news of the cross —how the steadfast love of an eternal God has been made manifest through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today, as in days past, the cross, which the world sees as foolish, offensive, and naive, remains for the believer the focus of our hope, and the truth by which we are saved.

Loving God, draw us to yourself, and may your wisdom fill us with that sure and certain hope that comes with trusting Christ, our Saviour. Amen

Gavin Robertson has recently retired after 23 years as a Chaplain in the Primary Reserves of the Canadian Armed Forces. He continues to work in team ministry with his wife Meridyth at First Presbyterian Church in Trail, British Columbia. Both Gavin and Meridyth are VST grads and have been strong supporters of St. Andrew's Hall over the years.

Saturday, March 16

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

*“This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.”*

I write this devotional after a long day which included my youngest son's first piano recital. It was also my first time attending a recital of any kind. The question I asked to other parents in days leading up was, “After my kid plays, do I need to stay until the end?” The answer across the board was “yes.”

So I listened to the kids perform their pieces, worried that my son's version of “Yankee Doodle” would pale in comparison to the prodigy playing “Carol of the Bells,” and wondering when this would all be over.

But when my kid went up there was a change in me. A charge went through me and as I watched and listened I'm sure I resembled this: 🥰. As we took our seats, I could see much better throughout the room flashes of wonder and joy in the families gathered. What I thought I had to endure was being made into something so much more. Indeed, “This is the day that the Lord has made...”

Though we often move too quickly to notice, the Lord has made our days and made them full of moments marked by God's good purposes and steadfast love which endures forever. For some of us it might be necessary to add: even on a day like today.

Today, on our approach to Easter, may we remember the one who made us, made our mourning turn into dancing, who made enemies into family, made dead people alive, and made the cross - an instrument of shame and death - become the glory of God and our salvation.

God, you made all that is good: give us grace and joy to perceive your marvelous works through Christ this day. Amen.

Joseph Bae is the lead pastor of Vaughan Community Church English Ministry, and he serves on the Board of St. Andrew's Hall.

Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 17

Philippians 2:5-11

“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

Paul urges the church in Philippi to give out of their abundance, to respond to God’s sharing of God’s self in Christ, by in turn sharing of themselves with each other. The *like-mindedness* instructed by Paul is an ongoing challenge for a life lived in Christ. As followers of Jesus, we are called to pause and consider the gifts of encouragement, comfort, tenderness and compassion we have received from God through him. From that pause we will be inspired to act, to do.

This pastoral wisdom passed first to the church in Philippi, and again to Christ-followers down the ages, is still fresh and alive for the church today. In pausing to reflect on our abundance in Christ, we will be naturally motivated to respond to God’s great love for us with humility and service to others.

Paul carries on his exhortation by drawing our attention to the radical nature of God’s grace in Christ, the one who took on the nature of servant and obedience to death that all might live. According to Hebrew scholar Amy-Jill Levine, the humility we are encouraged to recognize here is not one of “meekness” or “gentleness” but rather an acknowledgement that we are all “poor” and “afflicted”.

Paradoxically, it is from that low place of our reality that we can be conduits of God’s powerful life-giving love.

In this season of reflection, may we all hear again Paul’s challenge to participate in the flow of abundant love, both receive it and give it. All of this so that Jesus Christ would be further known as Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God the Father.

Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us how deep your love for humanity is, that you would humble yourself, even unto death. Grant us like-mindedness with you, that others would see you in our words and deeds. Amen.

Rebecca Simpson is the Director of Denominational Formation for Presbyterian students at St. Andrew’s Hall and Vancouver School of Theology.

Monday, March 18

Isaiah 50:4-9a

"Morning by morning he wakens, wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I did not turn backward."

In our busy lives, it can be hard to find time to think and reflect. We are constantly surrounded by noise, making it difficult to hear God's quiet messages. But during Lent, we have a special chance to wake up and pay attention to God's teachings.

Imagine waking up to a beautiful sunrise, filling the sky with vibrant colours. As the darkness disappears, you hear the world come alive with sounds – birds singing, leaves rustling, and a gentle breeze whispering. In that peaceful moment, you realize how important it is to listen to God's voice every morning, like the prophet describes.

The prophet hears the Lord awakening his ear, opening it to divine wisdom and instruction. This passage reminds us of the value of being attentive and receptive to God's voice in our lives. It speaks of humility, acknowledging that we are not self-sufficient but in need of God's guidance and teaching.

But it is also a call to obey. The prophet says, "I didn't rebel; I didn't turn away." Lent encourages us to examine our hearts and confront any rebelliousness or resistance within us. Are there areas of our lives where we have turned away from God's will? Are we willing to submit ourselves fully to His divine plan?

During this holy season, today's reflection reminds us to humble, obey and open to God's voice. By taking intentional steps to awaken our ears each morning, we can create space for God to speak to us and transform our lives. It is in this openness and receptiveness that we will find not only new growth, deeper understanding, and a genuine closeness to our Creator, but the ability "to sustain the weary with a word" (v.4a). As we journey through Lent, may our ears be ever attuned to the gentle teachings of the Lord, guiding us towards a more faithful and purposeful life

Lord, awaken my ears each morning, teach me to listen. May I follow faithfully without turning backward. Amen.

Astrid Melatunan, is a Master of Divinity Student a Vancouver School of Theology and a Youth Minister at Coquitlam Presbyterian Church.

Tuesday, March 19

Romans 8:6-11

⁹ "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

"Do they have the Holy Spirit?"

I was surprised and embarrassed when asked!

I was invited to a Thanksgiving function for a young lady from a former church we attended together who was paralyzed due to a skiing accident. In conversation, a former member from the church I attended asked which church I was currently attending. I replied, "a Presbyterian Church." Shockingly, she exclaimed, "Presbyterian! *Do they have the Holy Spirit?*" I paused, then answered, "I do!" I believe that was the Holy Spirit in me.

It is not unusual for Christians to measure other Christians' spiritual depth based on the denomination or church they attend. Often surprise was expressed at my faith background because I talked freely about the Holy Spirit.

Aren't we thankful the Holy Spirit is given by God to the church, believers in Christ, and not to a denomination or a specific group? So then, being Christians, we have the Holy Spirit enabling us to live God's way. Not being controlled by the flesh but under the authority of the Spirit, we know we belong to Christ; what relief!

Think of it, if the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead lives in us, how much more are we capable of overcoming the flesh? In this season let us focus our attention on the power within us, the Holy Spirit.

Gracious God, thank you for being so kind in giving us the Holy Spirit to live in us so that we can live for you. In Jesus' name. Amen

The Rev. Sybil Mosley, (D.D.) was a 2023 Guder Scholar at St. Andrew's Hall and is Minister at Livingstone Presbyterian Church, Montreal; Past Moderator of Montreal; Moderator of The Synod of Quebec & Eastern Ontario.

Wednesday, March 20

John 11:1-45

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Back in seminary, one of my colleagues (Rev. Paul Wu) preached a sermon likening the college and its chapel to a tomb!

I remember well the pause that followed that statement! Then he went on to talk about how in our Christian formation we are all called to die to self that we might take up the ministry of Jesus. I am remembering this now as I read about Jesus raising Lazarus. I find myself noticing this: that when Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb, he asks God to do this miracle for the sake of the crowd, that they too might believe God sent Jesus.

In John's gospel believing is associated with what and how we see.

So imagine being in the crowd that day. What do you see and experience?

- When Jesus cries with his friends?
- When Jesus insists they take the stone away from the mouth of the tomb despite their insistence that it will expose them to the death and stink?
- When Jesus calls and Lazarus emerges alive?
- When Jesus asks you to remove the linens and free the man who is no longer dead? To touch and tend, to help him live again?

Can you ever look at the world in the same way again? How might you live now?

In dying to ways that are not of God, and rising again to newness of life we need Jesus. And in this life we also rely on the people who see and believe in him, and tend the life that Jesus has called forth.

Thank you for the newness of life, the opportunity to begin again that Jesus offers, particularly when we might see only death and endings and thank you for people of faith who see and believe, tending, encouraging, and strengthening others in their Christian Journey. Amen.

Reverend Dr Karen Dimock is the minister at St. Andrew's Church Ottawa. In January of 2024 she was the Pastor in Residence at the Centre for Missional Leadership.

Thursday, March 21

Daniel 9:15-25a

“Lord our God [...] who made for yourself a name that endures to this day.”

An umbrella and TV remote control are two things that have a short life span in our home. With young children playing and running around the house, what seemed to be a strong hard plastic has shown itself to be frail and flimsy.

Lately, I have noticed something else that seems to have little permanence – the news of our everyday lives. In a 24-hour news cycle world, it is easy to see how our ordinary, everyday lives have little lasting influence, even the stories that populate the human heart and bring meaning to life. I find it difficult to find news that lasts even for today, while even more difficult to find enduring stories that are good, perfect and acceptable.

In today's biblical passage the prophet Daniel prays to God, and in confessing his sins, Daniel exalts God by highlighting the way his name is made known throughout the ages. During the prayer, the angel appeared and revealed the coming of the *Anointed One*.

It is so beautiful how God hears, forgives, and continuously comes toward us.

In times when news seems ephemeral with not many reasons for optimism, I am grateful for God because he made himself a name that endures forever. The poet Rubem Alves states: "Optimism is when, being spring on the outside, spring is born on the inside. Hope is when, being absolutely dry on the outside, the sources continue to bubble inside the heart."

Dear God, we praise you, for your name is known also today, filling us with hope. Amen.

Paulo Pereira Jr. is a former resident of St. Andrew's Hall and completed a Master of Theology (ThM) at VST on Evangelism under the supervision of Dr. Ross Lockhart. Paulo was selected as a 2023 Guder Scholar and is now ministering back home in a Presbyterian congregation in Brazil.

Friday, March 22

Psalm 31:9-16

“Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.”

It seems to be that the absolute best and worst moments of our lives are the stories that we replay over and over again in our heads. The worst moments are the ones that pop into our mind at strange times, whether we want them to or not.

Long after an important event has taken place, its story clings to us. The memories of it may fade, but the feelings we had remain just under the surface long after.

In my own life, one of those moments was a phone call I received while driving, with difficult news on the other end of the line. In that moment, with more tears than are safe for when you're driving, with no one around me, and no way of changing the news I was given, I found myself praying.

I can't remember what the words were exactly, but it was brief, repetitive and begging God to be there with me. That is where my hope was when all other hope seemed to have faded away.

The Psalmist is singing feelings of despair along with words of trust and hope. They are coming from a place that most of us have been at some time or another. Feelings of hopelessness, brokenness, grief and despair are what lead us to our biggest questions for God. The words of Psalm 31 remind us that we have no hope except in God's mercy, love and grace. In moments of hopelessness, what will help us say “I trust in you Lord; You are my God.”?

Lord, for everyone who is struggling this day in our lives, including us, we ask for your presence, power and purpose to be made clear through prayer. Amen.

Maren McLean Persaud is a Presbyterian minister in Calgary, Alberta where she also works part-time as a music teacher. She was grateful to be a St. Andrew's Hall Guder Scholar in 2023.

Saturday, March 23

Ezekiel 37:1-14

*³ He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?"
I answered, "O Lord God, you know."*

In the popular dystopian young adult series, *The Hunger Games*, the main character, *Katniss*, inadvertently fuels a rebellion against the dominating ruling power, the *Capitol*. In retaliation for her role in the rebellion, she is later informed of the horrific bombing of her hometown... and all that is left is a valley of bones and an overwhelming sense of hopelessness.

Through the wars and conflict in the 21st century, we also can relate to the valley of bones that Ezekiel envisions. From Ezekiel's perspective, and our own reality today, stories of death and destruction, consumes the news cycle overshadowing life and restoration. This leaves us to feel discouraged and hopeless. When God asks Ezekiel, "can these bones live?" he responds: "O Lord God, you know." Ezekiel rolls the ball back into God's court, knowing that from a human perspective the answer is a resounding no; death will have the day.

Thankfully, the story doesn't end there. The Good News is that the Lord God acts on our behalf. "I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live". God will raise the dead, God will execute justice, God will bring about this world's eternal home uncorrupted by human pride.

In this season of Lent, we may feel the weight of our broken humanity and sense our inability to fully testify to the sovereignty of God through our words and actions. Yet as God asked Ezekiel, the Lord asks you and me today, "can these bones live?"

By faith in the God who raises the dead we can confidently answer YES! Just as God led Ezekiel into the valley, the Lord leads us in similar fashion into the promised land and miraculously there is resurrection in our proclamation and witness.

Give us, O God, the grace to trust your Living Word, the boldness to proclaim your Gospel and the confidence to put our faith in action for your eternal kingdom. Amen.

Sean Astop is the Minister at St. Andrew's-Chalmers Presbyterian Church in Uxbridge, Ontario and served as a 2023 Guder Scholar at St. Andrew's Hall.

Psalm Sunday, March 24

John 12:12-16

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!"

"Hosanna – Lord save us!" Whenever I see the word "Hosanna," I am impressed by its magical power of joy. I can imagine people on the street waving palm branches and cheering for Jesus. There is no anger or despair, only joy, blessings, and praise. With a happy face, Jesus was marching through the streets on a donkey.

We know how the story goes on. Jesus already knew the dark future coming upon him. However, he fully enjoyed this moment of glory given by the Lord.

If I were him, I would feel nothing because of the fear of the times ahead. Rather, the time of joy and glory gave Jesus the strength to fulfill God's word and will. Suffering was restored to the glory of God.

Anxiety about the future is always hovering around me, attracting my attention. But God led me here, and this is God's blessing.

Let us try to fully feel the joy of this life that the Lord has given us on Palm Sunday. Then, God's grace and love will save us from the time of trials.

Lord, thank you for all of your blessings. Help us to pray with joy and gratitude for your overflowing blessings. Amen.

Chorong Shin is a Master of Divinity student at VST, a member of Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church, and lives at St. Andrew's Hall with her husband, Jaebok, and their two children.

Monday, March 25

Psalm 36:5-11

“Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. How precious is your steadfast love, O God!”

The weather in Lethbridge, Alberta, can be extreme, especially in the winter. It can be cloudy and cold at -15C in the early morning and then suddenly change to sunny and warm at +10C in the afternoon. What makes this contrast? The Chinook wind is the main factor that makes this contrast in the weather.

David talks about a stark contrast in Psalm 36: the sinfulness of humanity and the holiness of God. The sinner is described as one who progressively steps into sin and finding no consequences, steps deeper still. He has no fear of God (v.1). He assumes that he will continue to get away with his iniquity (v.2), so then he devotes his life to sin (v.3). Before long, he lies on his bed in the dead of night, plotting and planning his evil deeds (v.4).

But then like a flip of a switch, David turns to the light and shows God in all His glory. Ponder these attributes of God that David describes: steadfast love (v.5), faithfulness (v.5), righteousness (v.6), perfect judgment (v.6), saving (v.6), a refuge (v.7), generous gift (v.8), life and light (v.9), defender and deliverer (v.11).

What a marvelous contrast! And these are the ones our hearts need to see. As God’s children living in a fallen world, it is hard not to despair when sin seems to reign. However, today Psalm 36 reminds us that God is still on the throne and that He rules in perfect righteousness. In fact, the world is actually full of God’s goodness, righteousness, faithfulness and steadfast love. *“Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds”* (v.5). God with all His splendor is the light that cuts into the darkness.

Next time you are overwhelmed by the brokenness and the darkness of the world, remember God’s light. *“There’s always a crack in everything,”* says Leonard Cohen, *“that’s how the Light gets in.”*

Help us, O God, to embrace the brokenness of the world as well as our own brokenness knowing that your light gets in no matter what. So, reign Light of the World, reign! Amen.

Daniel Surya is the Minister of Word and Sacraments at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Lethbridge, Alberta. He is an alumnus of the Vancouver School of Theology/St. Andrew’s Hall (2019-2022) where he lived at St. Andrew’s Hall during his studies.

Tuesday, March 26

Isaiah 49: 1-7

“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

As we read these verses, we are given information that the author, Isaiah is chosen and called even before conception. The passage seems to move from God calling Isaiah to God choosing Israel.

A quick introspection, what has God called you for? Many of you would be in the marketplace. Can I encourage you to be a good witness for Him. The world needs to see faith in action as we articulate our faith.

The second half of verse 6 is something, that caught my attention. As I sit to pen these lines, the war between Israel and Hamas continues, both sides accusing one another. News channels bombarding us with images of the innocent civilians caught in between. What is God's word telling us?

Is it about the nation, Israel or can it be, we the New Israel because of our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ? How can the followers of Jesus be the light to the non-Christian world?

As we meditate upon the passion narratives, we surely will have some opportunities to share. Can we be creative in sharing our faith and guide some to the light of this world? The words don't ask us to direct them to the Word but become a light to the world, so that God's saving grace would reach to the last and the least through us.

*Gracious Lord, help us to be lights in this world where darkness dominates.
Amen.*

Krishna Rao Durbha, is a resident of St. Andrew's Hall and is studying in the Master of Divinity program at Vancouver School of Theology. He is an Elder at Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church and came to know Christ during his college years in India. Krishna feels blessed to be able to follow Jesus and prepare for a Ministry of Word and Sacraments within the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Wednesday, March 27

Hebrews 12:1-3

“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

Over the years I've signed up to run the 5 km St. Patrick's Day run in Stanley Park. It's a lot of fun. Everyone dresses up in green costumes and thousands run the beautiful course along the ocean in Vancouver's most famous park. Anyone who has run a race (a short 5 km up to a full marathon) will tell you that the presence of those on the sidelines is important. The words (shouts!) of encouragement, the glass of cold water snatched while running by, even the silly mascots dancing on the sidewalk all serve to lift a runner's spirits.

Today's famous passage from Hebrews 12 employs the imagery of running a race of faith, with our eyes looking forward so that we can clearly see Jesus. Like that 5 km run in Stanley Park, the path ahead of us is clearly defined. Jesus has gone ahead of us, his life, death, and resurrection has paved the way for sinful humanity to be reconciled to God and one another. Not only that, but Hebrews 12 says that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. The Communion of Saints, those who have loved Jesus here on earth and now rest with him in the life to come. How encouraging to know that as we lean into this metaphor of our life of faith being a race, we are cheered on by Christ followers down through the ages. I can even think of a few precious loved ones who have gone to be with Jesus that are cheering me on. Who are the faces and names of those in your own life who are in the Communion of Saints cheering you on as you run your race of faith?

Like any race, there will be moments where we stumble, doubt ourselves and wonder when the finish line will come into sight. Be encouraged. Like running through Stanley Park with thousands of green clad St. Patrick's Day friends, you are not alone. Even today, so many are reading this devotion and praying together. Let's give thanks that the race of faith set before us is set upon a road filled with Christ's sanctifying grace. He waits for us, as those who have gone before us cheer us on along the way.

Father, bless the road we journey this day. Help us to see your boundary markers, to feel the encouragement of the Saints who have gone before us, and to look forward...always...to the powerful presence of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ross Lockhart is Dean of St. Andrew's Hall.

Maundy Thursday, March 28

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

"Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live."

The documentaries under the title "The most dangerous ways to school" have encouraged me to think about our faith journey. One film about two nomad children in northern Mongolia, who face daily challenges in travelling to school in town from their nomadic steppe, especially in wintertime where temperatures fluctuate from zero to minus 50 degrees Celsius.

Delgertsetseg, a 12-year-old girl, gets up early to attend morning classes, and her father takes her on a motorcycle through icy cold wind and snow. In addition to the frozen roads, there is a dangerous river to cross. Wild dogs can snatch their heels if they lose speed or balance on the motorcycle.

Tuguldur, a 10-year-old boy, from another village rides a 10-kilometer route to school on horseback alone for the afternoon classes. It seems almost impossible to control the reins when the horse runs or gallops, for a young boy who cannot even get on the horse by himself. His father is aware of all the risks but still lets the boy ride as their children should learn the life lesson to survive and attend school. To avoid the icy streets and cars, the boy leads the horse down in deeper snow through the forest and on the frozen river. His family friend in town keeps the horse while he is at school. The way back home is more challenging because the day is short. The horse seems scared, but the child overcomes the fear every time.

The stories reminded me of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* as these nomadic families take the risky way as they believe education will bring a bright future to their children. However, only the faith in Christ leads us to "Living Water" because of the precious gift of God although we still stumble at difficult moments in our lives.

Thank you, O Lord, for understanding our weakness, fears and worries. Help us to make our prayers not to ask for what we want but to wait for what you plan through us. Amen.

Mihye Park is the Housing Manager at St. Andrew's Hall and a member of Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church.

Good Friday, March 29

Psalm 22

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Sometimes we try to prevent “wasting other people’s time” and we oversimplify our lives, and we feel we cannot be honest to say how we are doing, and we just say, “I am good”, or just “good”, or “fine, and you”, or “ok.”

During this day known as “Good Friday,” we are reminded of the type of sincere and authentic relationship that Jesus had with His Father, God. Jesus is being crucified, and two books of the Bible show Jesus crying aloud “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34) Jesus prays the words of the Psalm 22 to express his feelings of abandonment to God.

On the third day after this crying out, Jesus was, according to Paul’s letter to the Romans, “appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead.” The Father answered to Jesus’ prayer, and had shown that He had not forsaken his “only begotten Son.” Jesus understands our struggles, He died for our sins, and was appointed as the chosen by God to offer us a resurrected life.

Our Father, thanks for such deep and powerful salvation, thanks for the compassion and empathy revealed in Jesus, in whom we have understanding of our struggles, forgiveness for our sins, and a new life, released from the power of evil and death. Thanks for your Spirit that resurrected Jesus from the dead and reveals your steadfast love for us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Afonso Issa lives at St. Andrew’s Hall with his wife Louinne and their children Leticia, Luisa, Alice and Tiago. Afonso is studying in the Master of Divinity Program at Vancouver School of Theology with the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Holy Saturday, March 30

1 Peter 4:1-8

*“Above all, love each other deeply,
because love covers over a multitude of sins.”*

“Lord, set me free!”

In a recent review of my journal, I noticed this written multiple times. Whether it be around a thought-pattern or behaviour, in relation to others or myself, this prayer was a plea from an honest place of desire. A true desire for freedom from the things that keep us from what is good and right may lead us down a road of suffering. The Apostle Peter tells us that this freedom comes through the suffering that we experience and God redeems.

During Lent, Christians choose to fast and abstain as a practice that is sympathetic to Christ’s suffering. We choose to suffer like Christ (albeit a smaller amount) so that we can be set free from the desires that keep us from truly free and abundant living. It’s paradoxical that our truest selves come through the lucid times of hardship. Like in winter, when all the leaves have fallen off the trees and you can see for miles with clarity, challenging times help us discern what is necessary and important while learning to let go of the rest.

Eugene Peterson writes it like this in *The Message* translation: *Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you’ll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.*

And what does God want? For us to love one another with deep affection and care. This is also what we want: to love and be loved. And so we see God at work even in our suffering. Though those winter days may be cold, love is like a blanket that covers us as Jesus has with his love.

Man of sorrows, you know our deepest sufferings as you do our greatest yearnings. May we be set free to love as you have loved us. Amen.

Angie Song is a ThM student at VST and resident of St. Andrew’s Hall. She is a minister with the PCC and is thankful to be in a season of learning.

Easter Sunday, March 31

Mark 16:1-8

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.

Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! Happy Easter to you and your loved ones. What an incredible journey this has been together throughout this season of Lent. Forty days and forty nights of prayer and reflection have now led us to this place. The pilgrimage of the soul ends in the joy and assurance of the empty tomb, and the paradigm-breaking awe of Jesus’ resurrection.

For us today, however, Easter is something we plan for, inviting friends for dinner, rehearsing special music at church, and anticipating with eagerness the joy of the holiday. For the first followers of Jesus who went to the Garden Tomb to anoint Jesus’ body for burial, they only prepared for sadness and sorrow. How overwhelming and confusing that first Easter must have been for Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome!

The massive stone was rolled away, the burial chamber exposed and inside an angel of the Lord with news of life beyond death – resurrection joy! No wonder the first witnesses of the resurrection stumbled out of the garden fearful, shaking and uncertain of what to say or do. Not only their lives, but all of human history was turned upside down in the moment. But note this, today as Christ followers we know the truth, beauty and joy of God’s forgiving grace that raised Jesus from the dead! Therefore, their confusion and speechless state did not continue. In fact, the angel commissioned them to be witnesses to the other disciples of what God has accomplished through an empty cross and an empty tomb. They were sent (missio) to tell others the good news that the God who created this world, has redeemed it (claimed it back!) in the matchless, marvelous, and magnificent name of Jesus our Lord.

Today, we too have experienced the overwhelming power of the Easter event, that commissions us to be missionary disciples – like those three women at the tomb – and be bold in telling others about God’s love for them in the name of Jesus.

God of resurrection joy, we praise you for the gift of Jesus Christ. For his life and ministry, his suffering and crucifixion, his resurrection and defeat of sin and death. Help us to be bold in our sharing through words and works, of the goodness of the gospel we know through our relationship with Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ross Lockhart is Dean of St. Andrew’s Hall

Notes



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