

St. Andrew's Hall
2022 Lenten Devotion Guide





St. Andrew's Hall

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Front Cover: The Celtic cross at the St. Andrew's Hall Centre

“Faith, therefore, is a steady and certain knowledge of the divine kindness towards us, which is founded on a gracious promise through Christ, and is revealed to our minds and sealed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit.”

- John Calvin

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with the startling proclamation that “we are dust and to dust we shall return.” (Genesis 3:19). To a death-denying world, this definitive word of our beginning and end is a wakeup call for those who have bought into the self-help narrative of our modern culture promising five easy steps to a new and younger you. Lent is a journey for Christians that prepares us for the paradigm breaking truth, that in Jesus Christ we discover a resurrected Rabbi rules the cosmos. As an Easter people, we know that our end and new beginning takes place in the waters of baptism. Through the birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, we are set free from sin and death to live for God, and with God, in this blessed, yet broken world Christ died to save. We live cheerfully as witnesses to what the Triune God is doing in, through and amongst us in the neighbourhoods we inhabit.

As we enter yet another Lenten season in the midst of a global pandemic, perhaps you come a little worn out and exhausted to this time of study. Maybe you are a bit discouraged or even bewildered by the events of the last twenty-four months. However you come to this Lenten study guide, I pray that the words and witness of the St. Andrew’s Hall community will both bless and encourage you.

St. Andrew’s Hall has been a gospel witness on the University of British Columbia campus for The Presbyterian Church in Canada since 1955. The Lord has given us a vision that St. Andrew’s Hall is 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.

You are invited to join our community in the next forty plus days in this journey of prayer and discovery. In the pages ahead, you will be blessed and challenged by the reflections of our SAH community as we take steps together towards the empty cross and empty tomb that gives us new life. The world may be an anxious place just now, but we know that we’ve been made for life with God. As creatures made from dust, and made new through water and the Spirit, we claim the hope of the gospel, while letting go of our fears. By doing so, I pray that all may find the comfort and joy that God gives us. In the cross, resurrection. In death, new life. In Jesus, our future. Thanks be to God.



Rev. Dr. Ross A. Lockhart
Dean of St. Andrew’s Hall

Ash Wednesday, March 2

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

The observance of Lent is one of Christianity’s oldest “pious practices.” Almost as old is the observance of Ash Wednesday to start the forty days of Lent. The themes that are emphasized in these liturgical “practices of piety” include Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, our sinfulness and susceptibility to temptation, and our preparation for the events of Holy Week.

There is no biblical text that mandates that the ancient Christian tradition of Lent should start on Ash Wednesday, or that certain practices should always take place. But in Matthew 6 Jesus instructs the disciples about the practices of piety that should characterize the life of faithful Jews. These include alms to the poor, public prayer, fasting, donations to the temple, and forgiving the transgressions of others. Jesus makes clear that these practices are important parts of the public witness of faithful Jews.

Following the teaching of Jesus, they are continued in the practices of the emerging Christian movement. But these practices of public piety are subject to Jesus’ critique and revision. Piety can be practiced as a way to impress others. It can be public for the wrong reasons. Where that happens, the piety becomes the self-serving distortion of the kindness of God to which we are called to witness.

As the church year comes full circle and returns to Lent, we can discover the problematic distortions of our piety and receive anew the blessings of Christ’s healing grace.

Lord of forgiveness and renewal, as you guide us through this Lenten journey, give us the courage to acknowledge how we distort the practices of piety and how to claim the forgiveness that you alone can empower. Amen.

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, March 3

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

“Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.”

Psalm 91 is one of the psalms that my mother prays every single day. She prays it for the protection of our family and the people around us. The words of assurance that the Psalm gives certainly offer comfort and security, in a world that is constantly changing.

However, those who have walked long enough with God certainly know that walking with God and taking refuge in God does not mean no harm will come our way. In fact, often life can knock us down and peace and security can feel so out of reach.

So how should we pray Psalm 91? Is the Psalm only an empty promise or wishful thinking of the Psalmist? What does taking refuge in God mean and does it do us any good?

Psalm 91 is a prayer and confidence that the Psalmist has in God. It was not born out of ignorant and blind faith in God, but out of a faith journey with God that has been tempered. It is not a word of promise that no evil will come our way, but that no matter what comes our way, God is still sovereign, and that God is able to bring good out of the greatest evil. And we need only to look at Jesus as our great example.

Those who walk with God and make God their refuge can have confidence that God is working in everything to bring good to those who love God and are called according to God’s purposes; and that nothing, and absolutely nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

So, we pray with the Psalmist, *Our refuge and our fortress; our God, in whom we trust. No evil shall befall us, and no scourge come near our tent, for You are our everlasting refuge and our dwelling place. Amen.*

Karen Tin is a resident of SAH and a student of VST. She is originally from Indonesia, and currently working on her MA in Theological Studies.

Friday, March 4

Exodus 5: 10-23

22 Moses cried out to the LORD "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? 23 Ever since I went to speak to Pharaoh, he has brought trouble on your people, and you have not rescued them at all."

Moses' first meeting with Pharaoh was a disaster. Pharaoh had no fear of Yahweh and no concern for Yahweh's people. When Moses asked to take his people into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to Yahweh, Pharaoh responded by accusing the Israelites of laziness "They don't have enough to do. They want to go out and sacrifice to their God, give them more work to do. Make them produce the same number of bricks but don't give them straw anymore. Let them gather the straw for themselves."

This not only increased the suffering of the Israelites but also caused them to turn against Moses. Their great deliverer had done nothing but add to their troubles! Imagine how Moses must have felt. He expected his request to be rejected by Pharaoh, but he was not expecting his own people to turn on him.

Moses was bitterly disappointed at what was happening. It seemed to him that God had failed to keep his promise.

In desperation Moses turned to God "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people?" But Moses was being taught to trust in God, alone. There was no one else that he could turn to.

The Israelites also were being taught to trust the Lord. By their very complaining they show that they have no confidence in God and His power to save.

They wanted results – but didn't realise that it is faith in the Lord and not works that bring about freedom.

We too, are asked to be faithful, even when we don't understand the troubles which afflict us. When things go wrong, we are to hold on to the sure promises of God despite the troubles.

Father, give us the courage to trust in you, even when it seems that everything is falling apart. Remind us that your promises are true and that you will never leave us.

Richard Knowler is a VST student, a Presbyterian Ruling Elder and an Outreach Worker for Union Gospel Mission in Vancouver.

Saturday, March 5

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

*“There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens...”*

I don't know about you, but it seemed like 2021 went by insanely fast. And just as it ended, 2022 started just as quickly. Time has been something that I've reflected on recently, and how quickly it goes.

I'm in grade 12 and just in a few months I will be graduating from high school, a season that at one point I thought would never end.

As I look back, however, on these past five years, yes there's been ups and downs, but the memories I've made, the friends I cherish, and the way God has grown me have all been worthwhile.

There is a mix of emotions when leaving something behind; a sadness for the fact that you'll never have this specific experience again; gratefulness for the time you had there, and every opportunity given; and lastly excitement for the future and all God has in store for the next season.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1 it says, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens...”; I love this verse because it shows how intentional our God is.

Everything that He's created has a purpose for a time and a season. As we go into this next season of our lives, whatever it looks like, let's lean into God and all He has done and will continue to do for us regardless of what may come.

Maybe God has you in a season that is really hard for you to process, and you're finding it really hard to live in. Or maybe it's the best season yet and you can't help but feel joyful.

Whatever it looks like, know that God has a plan for each moment, each day, and each opportunity sent your way. Be blessed.

Emily Lockhart looks forward to volunteering this summer at Camp Douglas and a gap year of Christian service overseas to follow.

First Sunday of Lent, March 6

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Normally we read the story of the temptation of Jesus as a lesson for Christian individuals. We will all face temptation and Jesus shows us how we can withstand it. But perhaps we can read it a little differently.

In the first place, the temptations faced by Jesus as he is about to begin his public ministry are specific to his work as Messiah. We all do face temptations but normally not the kind we see here. Maybe that phrase “public ministry” gives us a clue. The public ministry of Jesus continues in the mission not just of individuals but in the church. The church is the “Body of Christ” and as such it carries on his ministry. So does the church face temptations and can it resist them?

One temptation not mentioned in this story is the temptation to do nothing or nothing out of the ordinary. The ones mentioned here are enough for today, however. The church is tempted by the desire to have “bread,” our needs met, especially if we have been short of bread for some time.

We can focus mainly on the needs of the church, not its mission. In church history a very successful temptation has been the offer of authority for the church. We may work mainly to preserve or extend that authority. Or we are tempted to use spectacular means to achieve good ends. “Throw yourselves down!” But the end doesn’t justify the means in Christ’s mission.

Jesus resists temptation by turning to Scripture. Note that it isn’t just quoting scripture; the Devil can do that very well. It’s a matter of using Scripture rightly, for good ends. And perhaps that is our main task as we follow the Master to Golgotha, to use these days to learn again to interpret scriptures faithfully and well.

Grant us, o God, the wisdom to interpret scripture faithfully and having done so, strengthen us to continue the work of Christ on earth. Amen

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

Monday, March 7

1 John 2:1-6

“Here is how we know we belong to him. ⁶ Those who claim to belong to him must live just as Jesus did.”

Walking the Walk.

In 1994 a cabin of 8-year-old boys at summer camp were introduced to the concept of being loved by God and living their lives reflecting God’s love by the choices they made. Their camp counselors invited the boys to do what Jesus would do if he was a camper just like them. So, the fun of Walking the Walk began.

Some things they did secretly: they lingered at the beach after last whistle when all the other cabins had headed up, they picked up left behind towels books or toys. They hurried to put them on the picnic table on cabin hill so others would easily find them. They secretly swept porches, left notes of appreciation, and even cleaned the bathrooms early one morning much to the delight of the cabin assigned to that duty.

Ten years later one of those boys, now a camp counsellor himself, introduced his cabin of campers to living our lives like Jesus.

We are invited again today to live our lives as Jesus would.

Whatever you face today, big choices or small annoyances, love or sadness, tasks waiting or empty hands the love of God meets you where you are.

We too can share God’s love by the choices we make, the words we speak and the actions we take.

May you and I be touched today by the joy and excitement of those campers who first learn the concept of living like Jesus. May you be blessed as you continue to walk your walk of faith.

Gracious God, bless our hands to do your work. Lead our feet to go where you need us and use our voices to speak of your love. Thank you for helping us make wise choices that reflect your presence in the world. Amen

Gwen Brown is an Ordained Minister in The Presbyterian Church in Canada and a member of the St. Andrew’s Hall Board.

Tuesday, March 8

Psalm 16

"I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."

Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.

Every year I look forward to greeting new residents at St. Andrew's Hall. At our Welcome BBQ in September, I wander through the crowd of undergraduate and graduate students and their families smiling and waving to offer hospitality and show Christ's love. The staff team at SAH works so hard to make our community a place of God's refuge and rest for those pursuing degree programs on the UBC campus.

I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

University is a time in one's life where one's worldview expands. There is a cacophony of voices from classroom to classmates to campus clubs all offering a vision of life's purpose. For those who come to their university studies with a mature (or maturing) Christian faith, as well as those from across Canada and around the world who are unfamiliar with the gospel, St. Andrew's Hall provides a witness to the love and way of our Lord Jesus. I delight in seeing St. Andrew's Hall residents participate in chapel services, bible studies and outreach programs on campus that give testimony to our faith. Seeing Jesus at work in this diverse, global student body is a highlight of my time at SAH.

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

As we move through the Lenten Season, we are walking a path with Jesus down the Transfiguration Mountain and up to Jerusalem. The path of life we walk takes us through Gethsemane and Golgotha. At St. Andrew's Hall and wherever this reading finds you today I invite you pause and thank God for the joy that is offered to us in relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Lord, you are gracious in providing refuge in times of trouble, comfort when we are shaken and joy in your presence throughout life's ups and downs. Apart from you we have nothing worth celebrating. Thank you for all you give us in this life, and in the life to come. Amen.

Andy the Bear is the official mascot of St. Andrew's Hall and has a particular interest in the study of Reformed Theology.

Wednesday, March 9

Job 1:1-22

“There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job.”

The story of Job starts like any good story. Job had everything going for him. He knew God, had a family he loved, and a good life. Job was the subject of a heavenly conversation, and the result was catastrophic.

His story goes from promise to problem, from stability to tragedy. We can hardly believe this story, except that it is like so many of the stories we know. Sometimes it's our story.

“The hits just keep coming”, said the text from a woman who just tested positive for COVID after a significant loss, and employment disappointment.

“I can't believe that this much pain has happened to me. I'm not sure how I can go on”, he confided. The work stress was intolerable, relationships were strained, the church that was once a place of sanctuary seemed to have become a place of distrust.

“In the bleak mid-winter isn't the name of a hymn, it's my life,” said the elder whose discouragement was palpable as he expressed the struggle of physical and emotional health concerns for his family, and other sorrows.

We are welcomed into Job's story to wonder how we would or could or do respond to God in our suffering and tragedy.

Job didn't blame God. Job blessed God. Could we?

We are invited to have empathy and to walk with others who seek compassion and understanding. Will we?

Trustworthy God, as we feel the ragged edges of our lives, give us hope in your abiding presence. Amen.

Jean Morris is the General Presbyter in the Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod. She is the Convener of the Board of Saint Andrew's Hall and serves on the Board of The Vancouver School of Theology.

Thursday, March 10

Philippians 3: 2-12

"I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!"

In 2019, the Bank of America forecasted that one of the biggest investment opportunities over the next decade will be to invest in companies that work to interrupt and delay human death. It is not too surprising, is it? After all, our modern society has become a death-phobic society: a society that perceives death as something to be eradicated—or at least for now, to be delayed as long as possible.

Why have we become so afraid of death? Perhaps the fear is rooted in our desire for a meaningful life—that is, we see our lifespan as the only opportunity to construct meaning in our lives through various kinds of accomplishments. Therefore, we fear death because it abruptly terminates our progress and efforts toward the fullness of life that we always find ourselves still try to pursue.

But what if we get it all wrong? What if the only way toward a meaningful life does not require us to escape from death, but rather to gladly embrace it? Perhaps this is what Paul is talking about in this passage and what Lent is all about. One does not need to be afraid of death because true human fullness cannot be found in one's endless effort and one's own pursuit for meaning anyway.

For Christians, the only way to live a meaningful life is precisely to participate in the meaningful death of our Saviour on the Cross. It is to let go of ourselves and to let ourselves be embraced by the God who invites us to participate in His death—even *while we are still living*. For it is only in our dying and then rising with Christ that we could experience the true fullness of life, for which we all long for.

Lord Jesus, Conqueror of death, help me to die before I die so that I will not die even when I die. Amen.

¹ The prayer is inspired by the inscription on a door at St. Paul's Monastery on Mt. Athos, which translated to English as "If you die before you die, then you won't die when you die."

Samuel Andri is a resident of St. Andrew's Hall and a student at VST.

Friday, March 11

Psalm 27:1-14

*"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living."*

Confidence starts this scripture reading, a confidence born of God and targeted in the land of the living. Unattributed to a particular moment in David's life, it feels like a universal Psalm that can apply to all times of his life and ours. A life dancing between love and loss.

There is a remarkable change in tone from the first to the second half of the Psalm. It changes from a confidence in the Lord for all blessings to a desire to dwell in God's protection from hurt. There is such a notable shift that many people think it is from two different Psalms brought together.

It can feel like our lives; one part of the day can be filled with joy, and the other part a call to be that good we experienced earlier. Our lives are sections of different dances brought together into a newly choreographed piece.

Calling us to act in confidence, not in tearing down our enemies but in building up the good of the world, fully confident of our blessings in Christ. Calling us to act in love and certainty because through us, nature and society, we will see and be the goodness of God in the land of the living.

We can be confident in seeing the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, for God is dancing with us and showing us how to share the moves ourselves.

God of fearless heart and confidence, help us dance through life as we add blessings onto what could be a treacherous floor. Amen.

Jacqueline Cleland is an M.Div. Student at VST and living at St. Andrews Hall. She is currently working on the Centre for Missional Leadership Certificate in Missional Leadership as well as her Theological Field Placement at Richmond Presbyterian Church that includes a Minecraft Ministry she developed.

Saturday, March 12

Psalm 118: 26 – 29

“The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, bind the festal sacrifice with ropes and take it to the horns of the altar.”

G. Campbell Morgan wrote, “It is remarkable to consider and understand that Jesus sang these words with His disciples a few hours before His crucifixion. He invited God the Father to bind Him to the cross in making a holy sacrifice for sins at God’s appointed altar”. Perhaps one way to grasp his embrace of song is to focus on the words at the start of the sentence- God’s light shining on us, his illuminating light of grace and freedom and joy.

As I write this devotion, my friend is dying of cancer. Like Jesus at Golgotha, there are mere hours of life left in this world. She and I have read of near-death experiences that consistently talk about the brilliant and loving light that is experienced. My friend has heard “Jesus is the light of the world” but does not know him as some profess. However, the descriptions of vibrant color and radiance fill her with hope and even joy of what and who she will experience. We focus on the coming freedom and the light, not the pain of the present and the gathering darkness. Maybe Jesus did the same as he sang, knowing God and eternal life in a way we never can here on earth.

Palm branches and hosannas will soon be on our lips, but it is the sacrifice of Good Friday that will bring the outpouring of light and new life on Easter morning. My friend’s journey will end soon but begin anew ablaze with light. Blessings on your journey too.

Jesus, you are a light unto my feet, and I praise you. Amen.

Mary Rozsa de Coquet is a Ruler Elder at Grace Presbyterian Church in Calgary and a member of the St. Andrew’s Hall Board.

Second Sunday of Lent, March 13

Luke 9:28-36

“About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray.”

These winter months have been difficult for us, especially because of the pandemic. We long for change, for transformation. We see transformation in nature when the sap flows through leafless branches, providing nourishment until they become leafy branches again, where birds can sit and happily chirp.

We see transformation in scripture when Peter -- one of the three who accompanied Jesus up the mountain to pray -- changed from someone who had denied Jesus and abandoned him, into being a key leader of the Early Church.

The process of transformation can happen when you open yourself, just as you are, to encounter Jesus in a deeper way.

On the mountain, the disciples overheard Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah about his departure – his death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus helped the disciples realize who he is as true God and true human, so their hearts could begin to change.

In Jesus' transfiguration, Luke points us to the cross and to the most powerful way God has transformed the world.

The cross was a horrible instrument of death, yet it too was transformed because, when Jesus died and rose from the dead, God broke the power of sin to destroy us.

God took the worst that this world could do to a person and overcame it so that in Christ we might be changed, and so live life with purpose and joy, trusting in the goodness of God.

Loving God, change us, moment by moment, so that your glory may be seen in us as we follow you into the world to be your agents of healing and hope.

Breathe in: This is my Son, my Chosen.

Breathe out: Listen to him.

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

Monday, March 14

Romans 4:1-12

“⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.”

I was born and raised in Taiwan before immigrating to Canada and the education system in Taiwan was very strict and competitive. Teachers and parents would tell us that for us to get ahead in the world, we would need to perform well at the nationally administered high school and university entrance exams, because getting into the right school meant everything for our future.

Learning in such a competitive environment was like living in a pressure cooker. To push us to be our best, I remember one of my teachers would set a target grade for each student for the preparation exams we took and assign a punishment for each point we received below the target grade.

I believed the teacher meant well and he was doing it out of his love for us. But it was almost impossible to live up to the high expectation. I also found myself being cursed by my own success. If I performed well on one exam, the hurdle got raised just slightly higher for the next exam and it became even more difficult to meet that target.

I carried this shadow into my adulthood, and it might have served me well in my career advancement. However, I found myself constantly needing to earn other people's recognition, to earn their accolades and even to earn their love. The bar gets raised ever slightly higher and the weight gradually builds, and it becomes exhausting.

But how can we earn God's love, the singular most important thing in our lives, when it is so vast and immense? There is no amount of work that we can do to justify ourselves and earn His love. What a relief it is that Jesus died for us not because of any work we did to deserve it. We can receive redemption of our sins not because of our own work but by accepting Him as our savior. This peace of mind of His genuine love is the most valuable thing to us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank you for loving us despite our pasts and for not measuring your love for us according to our work and accomplishments. We pray that we can follow your example and try to love those around us for who they are, as children of God.

Larry Yen is a Ruling Elder at Vancouver Taiwanese Presbyterian Church and a member of the St. Andrew's Hall Board.

Tuesday, March 15

Numbers 14: 10-24

"...according to the greatness of your steadfast love"

This, with the story that precedes it, is a terribly difficult text. God's people, themselves former slaves, are told to become colonizers and when they hesitate, they stand under a divine threat of obliteration, only to be interceded for on the basis of the love and reputation of God, but the picture of God in this passage seems far removed from one of love.

In struggling with texts like this, I am reminded that our perception of God, and our interpretation of God's word to us, stand, like everything else, under the shadow of sin. Lent reminds us of this. We are broken, complicated people, and the world is a very broken and complicated place.

Yet, within this text, the words of Moses remind us that God's steadfast love is great. In fact, we believe that God is love, and that, if we stick with the story long enough, we will see God's good will for all being done.

So, can we remain faithful? Especially when the immediate path before us might be bleak, or when the picture of God presented to us seems opposite to the one of love to which we desperately hold?

This is the challenge of Lent. Faithfulness through what is bleak. Faithfulness and grace with ourselves when we are ones that are broken. Faithfulness with a massive dose of confession when we have done the breaking. Faithfulness when we want to run away, ready to give up on freedom and life, out of fear for what might lie ahead.

This passage is not easy. Neither is life or Lent. But let's stick with the story long enough.

Dear Lord, keep me faithful in times of bleakness, build my trust in you when I cannot see or understand the road ahead. Your will be done. Amen.

Matt Brough is a SAH/VST grad, an author and is the minister of Prairie Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg.

Wednesday, March 16

Luke 13: 22-31

*"People will come from east and west and north and south,
and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. "*

Several years ago, we went on a pilgrimage trip to the Holy Land. To enter the Nativity Church in Bethlehem all visitors had to enter through a tightly narrow and short door called "The Door of Humility." I don't think it was designed to selectively allow people of a certain height or weight only. We all know the intended meaning was that worshippers enter the sanctuary in humility and the physical act of lowering yourself as you enter was a demonstration of that.

The whole teaching about the narrow doors and the gnashing of teeth for those who are too late to the party tells us that not all who claim some sort of a loose connection to Christianity are able to enter. Those are not the requirements to be in the kingdom. Darrell Bock puts it this way, "God does not save us through our activity, through heredity, or by proxy."

The central message of Luke is "do you know Jesus?" and not "do you know about Jesus?" by way of some loose association. Do you trust in Jesus' saving work to deliver us from sin and into grace and freedom? Have you experienced forgiveness by faith in Jesus Christ? And indeed, "Praise Jesus!" that God invites all people from all places to receive the humble king, our one and only Saviour.

We praise you Father God for the gift of your precious Son who in obedience and humility came to serve and save. Amen.

John Paeng is the minister at St. Columba in Parksville, BC and serves as the Clerk of Vancouver Island Presbytery, as well as a Board member of St. Andrew's Hall.

Thursday, March 17

Daniel 3:19-30

"Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants!"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue and as a result, the King had them thrown into an extremely hot furnace. One may think this is where the story ends, but a fourth person who is described as a son of God, joins them in the fire, saves them and the three men walk out of the furnace, unharmed and untouched. Thanks be to God!

They went into that fire trusting and believing in God. Just as Jesus did in the wilderness, throughout his whole ministry, and his journey to the cross. Just like us, as we are called in our own lives, to trust and believe.

I feel like this is what the Covid-19 pandemic has felt like, a fiery furnace. And just like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego we don't know what the end results will be, we don't know the long-lasting impacts on self and others from the pandemic. What we do know, is that God loves us, and will see us through whatever fires this world has to offer.

What furnaces have you been thrown into lately? What have your responses taught you about your faith? Is it trusting? Is it full of belief? Is it grounded in the promises of God?

For I tell you, it is this trust, this belief, and those promises that bring us hope on days that are isolating, and in moments of despair, it brings peace on days that are uncertain and in moments you feel like you cannot bear.

Praise be to the Father in heaven, who loves us all, and who rescues those who trust and believe. Amen.

Chelsey Joudrie is a SAH/ VST student. She serves as the Lay Youth and Outreach Minister at Calvin Presbyterian Church in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Christian Educator at Bethel Presbyterian, Scotsburn, Nova Scotia.

Friday, March 18

Revelation 3:1-6

"I know you have the reputation of being alive, even though you are dead. So wake up and strengthen what you still have before it dies completely."

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus has advice for seven churches to help redirect and rebuild their futures. He is saying to the church of Sardis you have a good reputation but now you are "dead".

The church was recognized for its previous service to Christ but no more. Wake up and rejoin the mission you had been successful at, or you may find you will lose everything.

A reputation is something applied from an external perspective, in this case it's a position presented from outside the Church. The Church of Sardis has a reputation of being alive, suggesting that it was doing good things for their community. But now it is dead, or those good services no longer continue and while the church is still there it is more internally focused.

Jesus then instructs the church to wake up and get back to what is important for the work of God. Or die completely of no value to the Kingdom.

It seems timely in this near post pandemic period, that we remind ourselves of what was so meaningful to us as a Church. For my Presbyterian Church in Coquitlam, before the pandemic we helped the poor and vulnerable, we supported school children not attending our Church, we took some of those children to Camp Douglas, we helped new immigrants learn our language, we encouraged persons struggling with addictions to help themselves.

All of this was doing the work of Jesus, showing those in need the Love of Jesus for each and every one of us. This outreach was alive and benefiting our community, we must reengage this and be a force for doing God's work for those in need.

Dear God, thank you for the reminder that we must continue to focus our efforts on sharing our love for You with those that do not know you. Amen.

Ron Zapp is a retired ruling elder of Coquitlam PC, President of the Presbyterian Senior Citizens' Housing Society and serves on the Board of Saint Andrew's Hall.

Saturday, March 19

Luke 6:43-45

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit [...] The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart [...] For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

Spring is in the air! A sense of new life surrounds us, budding trees, chirping birds and happy moods awaiting summer.

When reading today’s illustration through God’s Word, we realize how rotten our fruit is. Our mouths speak anger, jealousy, and other sin. If we’re honest, we clearly resemble the evil man in the passage. When reading it in light of the gospel, we can confidently proclaim it as fact – our fruit is good, we are good trees!

God says it’s impossible to bear good fruit unless we remain in Him (John 15). Through repentance and faith in Christ we continue to be healthy branches. Each time we hear the Word and believe the gospel there’s a spring-like awakening in our hearts. God’s forgiveness is ours, and by the help of the Holy Spirit we grow in our sanctification. With Jesus as the true vine, we can be confident our fruit is good.

May we hold firm to Him and store up good treasures in our hearts that will spring forth as love for neighbour and obedience to God in both speech and deeds. May our hearts overflow with peace and praise!

God, strengthen these trees and help us produce good fruit to bless those around us. Amen.

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

Third Sunday of Lent, March 20

Isaiah 55:8-9

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts”

In this passage, God announces that the buoyant and joyful divine promises to the people of Palestine – promises for them to feast and flourish in security and peace – were coming true in a way no one expected, through the Persian emperor (who most regarded as their enemy).

Therefore, Isaiah reminds them: God’s mercy is wider than they could envision. God’s ways are not their ways!

In our polarized age, we can easily assume that God wants to curse or even obliterate our enemies just like we do.

God’s ways are not our ways, however!

What a difference it could make in your relationships, conflicts, and political engagements if you recognize that God loves your enemies with as much abandon as God loves you.

How might this reality impact how you engage others?

As you prepare to pray: Identify one relationship, conflict or political dialogue that is fractious or troublesome for you. Take a moment to envision the lavish love of God for this person or situation. Now ask God how you might re-engage anew and take time to listen to the Spirit.

God, I acknowledge that your ways are not our ways. Grant me grace to see my enemies within the circle of your divine love, Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.

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

Monday, March 21

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

“By the grace God has given me . . .”

I like the way Paul — the greatest yet the humblest apostle of Jesus Christ — lays out his reasoning regarding the church division that happened in Corinth.

While the church members cared so much more on who was the greatest between him and Apollos and Cephas (v.22), Paul chose not to “fan the flame” of his followers to “despise” Apollos’ and Cephas’ teachings. No, instead he humbly chose to establish a beautiful theological reason so that his church members (as well as Apollos’ and Cephas’) would be able to see the real issue in God’s big picture.

In response to the praises that Paul received from his followers — as if it was because of his own merit or skillfulness — the apostle clarified that it was not his doing. Instead, “by the grace God has given me . . .” Paul did what he did and that he taught what he taught. And not only that God’s grace is the dynamo of his ministry, but God’s grace is also the very foundation on which he builds his teachings and ministry towards the church in Corinth. With that in mind, Paul clearly ends his letter by saying, “no more boasting about human leaders!” (v.21)

As theological students we all have our own favorite theologians to some degree, whether that be Calvin, Luther, Knox, or Barth. Though there is nothing wrong with that regarding our academic preference, yet today’s devotion reminds us of the danger that could lead to division among the body of Christ.

And I believe if our favorite theologians were still alive today, they would also express the same sentiment as what Paul expressed: “By the grace God has given me . . . all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.” (v.1, 22, 23)

Dear God, thank you for those who you send to teach us the faith and grow in our love of Jesus. Help us to always acknowledge your grace at work in those around us. Amen.

Daniel A. Surya is a MATS program student at VST, and he and his family have been residents of SAH since August 2019.

Tuesday, March 22

Ezekiel 17:1-10

“Will it thrive? Will it not be uprooted and stripped of its fruit so that it withers?”

The word of the LORD came to the prophet as a riddle and a parable as well. It means that this combined form of the text tells the audience both a surface meaning and a deeper one.

The parable concerns two great eagles, a cedar, and a vine. The first eagle, which is Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, broke off the newest growth of a cedar, which is Jehoiachin the king of Judah, and carried it off to a land of merchants, Babylon.

Then, in the cedar's place, the eagle planted a vine, which is Zedekiah, and provided fertile soil and abundant water supply for its maximal growth. However, the vine turned away from the first eagle and sent its roots toward the second eagle, which is Egypt.

The meaning of the parable was not difficult to infer for the original audience. It revealed that Zedekiah's foreign policy was suicidal, and his revolt could not succeed because of its basis standing on the lesser power, not on the dominant superpower.

It is the surface meaning of the text, but we should remember that it is also a riddle concealing a deeper meaning. Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar indicates Israel's rebellion against the LORD.

If it is obvious that Zedekiah's political strategy is foolish and self-destructive, how much more deadly fault it is if the people of God turn away from the LORD who is the ultimate power over all things. It means that the only way we can thrive is to stand firm on the greatest power Jesus Christ revealed on the cross.

Dear LORD, help us not to be foolish trusting lesser power but to trust in the greatest power of your love. Amen.

Hwikyung Kim is a SAH/VST alum (Master of Divinity) and serves the Korean Presbyterian Church of Edmonton.

Wednesday, March 23

Luke 13:18-21

"18 Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like?"

When I read today's scripture passage, I had to smile to myself. Two of the days I work at Lions Gate Christian Academy in the kindergarten classroom. The children are so much fun! Everything is new to them. Mary Munro, the teacher, (whom some of you will know from Fairview Presbyterian in Vancouver) and I spend the first six weeks teaching the children how to line up, ask to go to the bathroom, how to hold a pencil properly, how to write their names, and how to put their hand up when they have a comment or question. Another teaching for the children is Jesus. Many of the children come from Christian homes where they regularly go to church and prayer is part of their daily lives. But there are some children who arrive in our classroom who've never heard of Jesus or been taught to pray.

Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like?" What shall I compare it to? I get asked about Jesus and heaven a lot by the children. Sometimes it is during a more structured time, during our morning devotions or end of day prayer time. Other times it is casually when I come alongside a child when they are playing to ask what they are doing or when I am helping a child practice writing their alphabet/numbers.

It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches. I take the opportunity to plant a mustard seed, a mustard seed of faith, of value, of care, of love. I see all these beautiful children God created in His image and know that He has placed me in a very important ministry. By nurturing these children into becoming disciples of Jesus, I pray that in turn they will be able to nurture and support future generations of Christ-followers.

Again he asked...It is like yeast that a women took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough. I often say to Mary, "Teaching kindergarten is not for the faint of heart!" It is hard work. I walk 10,000 steps before I leave at 3:15 pm, and I haven't even gone for my daily walk yet! But the hard work of teaching and nurturing these little souls is worth it, like anyone who's made bread from scratch knows. Jesus' parable reminds me of the importance of the ministry I am currently engaging in and its eternal impact.

Lord, thank you for those who inquire about you and your kingdom in our daily lives. Help us to show your love in the world through our character, actions and words this day. Amen.

Laura Lockhart is an Educational Assistant at Lions Gate Christian Academy and supporter of St. Andrew's Hall.

Thursday, March 24

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5

*“Though outwardly we are wasting away,
yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day”*

Paul is writing this heartfelt letter to the Christians in Corinth to defend his ministry. His apostolic authority has been challenged and he has been insulted.

We can feel his pain as he is struggling physically and emotionally. Despite this, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to persevere, not to lose heart over earthly matters but to look forward to the promised heavenly future--to “fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

We know that our physical body, this “jar of clay”, will be ravaged by disease, suffer daily wear and tear, and break down with age. Despite our best efforts to live a healthy lifestyle, many of us are already seeing physical and mental signs of this inevitable decay.

It is so easy to be discouraged if our focus is only on this aspect of our existence. However, for those in Christ the exact opposite is happening inside us. We may not be able to see it, but inwardly we are being transformed and renewed day by day preparing us to receive our resurrected body.

What is unseen is an amazing indestructible body waiting for us in heaven that will allow us to enjoy fully and freely the expression of God’s Spirit in us.

During this time of Lent, it is good to reflect on this good news and be assured that entropy and death do not have the final say. A loving and redeeming God does!

Lord thank you for Spirit in us guaranteeing our future with You. Amen.

Victor Ling is a cancer researcher. He serves on the Board of Saint Andrew’s Hall.

Friday, March 25

Joshua 4: 14-24

“Those twelve stones, which they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal, saying to the Israelites, “When your children ask their parents in time to come, “What do these stones mean?” then you shall let your children know ‘Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.’”

When we feel adrift, deep into these forty days
And Easter seems to be far in the distance,
May these stones and stories anchor us.

As we journey through the seasons of our life
And we wonder who we are,
May these stones and stories remind us.

When we are two years into a disorienting global upheaval
And we are standing on shifting sands,
May these stones and stories ground us.

When we are leading others through the wilderness
And unsure of what comes next,
May these stones and stories guide us.

May these stones and stories mark our path
Guiding our feet on dry ground,
Leading us onto the next part of the journey

Breath Prayer

Inhale: The path is not clear

Exhale: Guide me on dry ground

Andrea Perrett is an Associate in New Witnessing Communities with the Centre for Missional Leadership at St Andrew's Hall. She is the Director of Cyclical Vancouver and Cyclical Calgary-Macleod.

Saturday, March 26

Luke 15:1-10

¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

When I was in elementary school, there was one thing I did not understand. While my friends and I talked in class, the teacher always pointed at me. Never once have my friends been pointed out: it was always me. At the time, I had no clue as to why I was always picked on; however, now that I am 39 years old, I finally know why. The reason is simple: My voice was louder than others.

I was a student who could not concentrate and disrupted every class by chatting with my friends. However, one of the homeroom teachers had an idea to prevent me from doing so, which was to put my desk next to the teacher's pulpit. Then, he made me read the paragraphs from the textbook every class and asked many relevant questions. This continued for three months. Although other classmates did not have opportunities to participate in class, this tactic of his was successful. Reading and questions made me concentrate on class, and I was able to finish the semester with the best grades.

Jesus came to this earth for the sinner, not the righteous. Jesus is one who focuses on one sinful person rather than a handful of good people. Jesus's eyes lock with those who are not good enough, behind others, and cannot keep pace with their peers. Then, as always, a person Jesus focuses on is restored and lives a new life by His love.

I want to ask you a question. Do you think you are a decent person or a sinful person? If you feel you belong to the latter, please, rejoice because the spotlight of Jesus Christ is shining on you.

Dear Jesus, shine a brighter light on us who are weak, not good enough, and full of sin. Amen.

Chanil Lee is a youth pastor at Disciple Methodist Church and Taiwanese Presbyterian Church. He is also doing VST/Durham Ph.D. program majoring in Homiletics.

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 27

2 Corinthians 5; 16-21

"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors..."

When you hear the word "ambassador," what comes to mind? You might automatically think of a politician who represents our nation in a far-off land. Or you might think of a stately diplomat who not only garners a great deal of respect and dignity, but also good pay and excellent benefits!

My brother-in-law, who works in the Federal Government, recently applied for a posting at the Canadian Consulate in Hong Kong. It was not an easy process. He had to go through a number of interviews, a full security screening, and other vetting procedures to ensure that he was the right candidate. It's a very tall responsibility to represent your country.

As Christians, we too have an important responsibility. We don't represent a country per se, nor the Queen or the Prime Minister. Instead, we represent Jesus to the world.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul likens his own calling to that of an ambassador, and he urges all Christians to consider themselves as an ambassador for Christ. Thus, we should see ourselves as representatives. We are to represent Christ and deliver His message so others can know Him too. How we live and what we say matters.

Are we walking like Jesus, talking like Jesus, conducting ourselves like Jesus, and living like a true ambassador of heaven? It is a very high calling, and it too has excellent benefits!

Father God, help us to be faithful ambassadors, as we proclaim the work of your son Jesus, who is reconciling the world to Himself.

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

Monday, March 28

Revelation 19:1-8

*“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory...”*

When we think of the Book of Revelation, most of us can't help but think of doom, and times of great tribulation. In our minds, we immediately go to the negative, and want to avoid reading any further.

But if we'd simply persevere, we'd find our way through. On the other side, we'd discover the victory in store for us as believers. God is on our side and has a plan that includes being reconciled to Him. When we consider this wonderful plan, we can see how much God really loves us and that gives us hope.

Normally when we walk through difficulties, we lament as the Israelites did when they walked through their wilderness. Even though God promised victory in the land flowing with milk and honey, they lamented. They complained about everything, even the good things God provided for them along the way. It was as if they had no hope.

We know our hope is in King Jesus. He rules an upside-down kingdom unlike kingdoms of this world, where He's merciful and provides for us along life's journey. Let's be upside down people. Instead of lamenting through trials and tribulations, let's praise Him along the way. Let's praise Him for His provision and salvation.

We may want to practice our praises now because eventually we'll be praising Him once we get to where we're going. Instead of taking away a usual practice during Lent as a means of sacrifice, let's add the practice of praising God... Hallelujah! Glory be to God! Amen.

Sovereign Lord, we thank you that you came to save us by your power and authority. You walk with us and provide for us along the way. You give us hope. We look forward to reaching the land you have promised us, and we give you all the praises and all the glory. 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.

Tuesday, March 29

Psalm 53:1-6

“God looks down from heaven on all humankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.”

Isn't it uncomfortable to read that “there is no one who does good”? It's a scathing assessment of society, yet we all bear the pain of those who suffer because of the ways of our world.

Think of all the emotions that rush through you as you walk past a homeless person on the sidewalk or drive past the person standing on the median at an intersection holding the “Anything helps” sign.

We all witness the brokenness of the world around us and our place in it. As long there are homeless shelters and food banks, as long as there are people denied medical care, as long as some are treated with more dignity than others, we have fallen short of God's plan for creation.

And as the psalmist reminds us, denying the existence of God doesn't alleviate either our pain or the suffering of others. An honest appraisal of the world requires us to admit to both God's agency at work all around us and our continued failures at working with God in the world.

There's only ever been One who was able to always keep God in the forefront of his thoughts and actions; we seem unable to do so. Yet in our poverty of faith, we can still call on the Lord to be our refuge and our “strong defence,” and in Christ's typical way of tipping everything topsy-turvy, through our weakness God's strength is seen.

Lord, help me to acknowledge the times my faith is weak. Use those times to show me your strength. Bring the whole of creation to joy and fulfillment, I pray. Amen.

Janet Taylor ministers with the people of Braeside Presbyterian Church in St. Albert, Alberta.

Wednesday, March 30

Luke 9:10-17

"But he said to them, 'You give them something to eat.'"

Our God is a God who provides. From Genesis to Revelation, scripture shows us that God gives wholly and freely to creation, of which we are one part.

In all things large and small, God gives to his people. Whether God's people have day-to-day mundane needs such as bread on the table or a roof over our heads, or an answer to a prayer that comes in the night, God places all before us.

In the bounty of God's grace towards us, we are given all that we have and everything that we need, in God's own time. There is no need that is too great or small, in which we cannot pray to God.

Let us have faith in this God, then. Let us have faith in Jesus Christ that he will provide for us, as he always has. Let us have faith that God will feed us, cloth us, claim and commission us. Let us have faith in the works that our Triune God has done and will continue to do for, with and through us.

On the first day I ever attended a service at my now home church, I felt glad to be there, but like many people searching for a church home, I wasn't sure *where* I was.

After the benediction I got up to leave, but our Clerk of Session came up to me and quietly invited me downstairs for our weekly post-service brunch.

Welcomed and fed, I have remained there ever since.

Lord Jesus, let us have faith that we are alongside the Spirit in the making of this world, being fed, and feeding others as we go. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Benjamin MacRae is a first year Master of Divinity Student at VST and lives at St. Andrew's Hall. Ben serves as a music director at Brentwood Presbyterian Church in Burnaby and as a freelance jazz musician in Vancouver BC.

Thursday, March 31

Isaiah 43:1-7

*“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”*

Mrs. Dain, my best friend's mother, recently moved from her beloved farm in Prescott Ontario to an assisted living facility in order to be closer to her daughters. This move could not have been easy for such an independent and strong-minded lady yet she accepted this life-changing event with graciousness and with courage. When I ask her how she navigated such a tumultuous time, she told me that she places her trust in God and faithfully prays that all will be well.

The season of Lent is a time for reflection, a time to consider the gifts of God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Lent often finds many of us pondering the meandering paths our own lives have taken. There are those amazing times when we have clearly seen God's footprints all over the path, lighting and directing our way. The prophet Isaiah speaks of those trying times when the path seems to have been washed away and we are left feeling singed by the fires that try to consume us.

Isaiah reminds us that when we go through trials and are weighed down by life upheaves and uncertainties that we are not alone, rather we have a companion along the way. One who knows you, loves you, cherishes you—redeemed you.

Jesus tells us, “Fear not for I am with you, even until the end of the age.” As we face changes and challenges in our life, and in our world, we can rely on these living words of Jesus. We can also be grateful for old friends, like Isaiah, and Doris Dain who speak courage and faith into our lives.

Prayer: Lord God, help us live courageously as cherished people who are filled with an abundance of hope we find through our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Shirley Carleton is a Master of Divinity student at Vancouver School of Theology and member of St. Aidan's Presbyterian Church in New Westminster.

Friday, April 1

Psalm 126: 1-6

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

How easy it can be to despair over the difficulties of daily life. As our myriad small problems mount, we pause to think; unfulfilled dreams present themselves, regret sets in, and before we realize it, doubt settles upon us like a frost.

During the dark nights of midwinter, amidst the continuing pandemic, Psalm 126 comes as a warm reminder of our blessed place under God; a reminder that when we bring our cares to the Lord, he will answer our woe with glad tidings.

From the time of our Baptism, why are we not always "like those who dreamed?" Our Saviour has come, conquered death. God loves us! How is this not enough to keep us from despair? How do we forget our blessings?

"We have a beautiful home, yes, but I would really like it to be bigger," a friend tells me, his voice betraying worry about money. There are those of us who feel forgotten, whose troubles are the focus of every waking hour.

"I'm lonely," another friend says, "and I am losing my sight." God's love seems remote, like the winter sun.

Our psalmist sings "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," reminding us we need to turn to God with our cares. Our despair can overwhelm us.

Carrying that "seed" in our hearts in prayer is the way to greatest joy.

Loving God, knowing that you are with us and will hear our prayers, help us rise above despair. Amen.

Christopher Orr is Facilities Manager at St. Andrew's Hall. He enjoys growing oak trees from acorns, and peaceful walks with wife Barbara and their unkempt toy poodle, Pip.

Saturday, April 2

Psalm 77

*“Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?
Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?”*

The psalmist begins today’s song by looking back upon troubling times in years past when the Israelites cried out to God, longing that God would hear a desperate plea for aid. Had God abandoned the psalmist? Was this person alone in the world?

Maybe you can think of times in your life when you’ve felt alone, even abandoned and uncertain whether there was a future where God would bless you? Several years ago, I was abandoned by a former resident at St. Andrew’s Hall. After move-out in the Spring, Mihye Park came across me in the hallway and, rather than discarding me, took me to the housing office. Later that day, several of the staff came by to say hello and Ross gave me the name “Andy the Bear,” with the official title of SAH mascot. From that day on, I had a new purpose and identity.

The psalmist recalls in the darkest moments that God is a divine source of rescue. The psalmist remembers God’s faithful presence with Israel as they fled Egypt. “The waters saw you and writhed...the clouds poured down water...your thunder was heard in the whirlwind...your path led through the sea...though your footprints were not seen.” In a time of despair and discouragement, God showed up and gave the people of Israel hope and provided a way.

Are you feeling alone or abandoned during this season of Lent, in a time of pandemic restrictions? Remember, our God is a rescuer, one who makes a path forward where we cannot see the way. Through empty cradle, cross and tomb we are adopted into a new family of faith, we are graphed onto Israel, the Red Sea parted now becomes *our story too*. As 1 Peter 2: 10 says so beautifully, “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Thanks be to God.

Loving God, thank you that even when we feel discarded or forgotten in life, you remind us through your living Word, Jesus Christ, that we are treasured, valued and precious to you. Amen.

Andy the Bear is the Chief Public Relations Officer for St. Andrew’s Hall and SAH’s official mascot. He can be found in the SAH staff room, reclining on the coach, and greeting everyone as they go about their day.

Fifth Sunday of Lent, April 3

John 12:1-8

“And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

Picture this bustling house. Martha was making dinner, Lazarus reclining at table, Mary anointing Jesus' feet. The fragrance of blessing filling the house.

Life with Jesus looks like this. At times it is utterly ordinary, like Martha making dinner, again. Other times, life with Jesus is extraordinary, like Lazarus risen from the dead, breathing and present with his family at the table, again.

And the fragrance of blessing filling the house.

Life with Jesus looks like Mary serving, Lazarus breathing, Mary worshiping.

But also, Judas is there, thieving and scheming. Judas' presence on this poignant evening, when it seems that all could one day be right with the world, reminds us of the ugly fact of injustice and betrayal still.

Judas' stealing from the poor and selling Jesus out to his enemies foreshadows the coming pain and death Christ will suffer very soon.

Life with Jesus is like this. Life with Jesus doesn't deny death, it doesn't turn a blind eye to betrayal or ignore injustice.

Life with Jesus stares injustice and betrayal in the face and invites them to dinner.

Life with Jesus looks like serving, breathing, anointing, and abundance of blessing despite what's not good, because in the end, the goodness of Christ has already won out over death. His powerful presence permeates all of life.

“And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” Let's not waste the perfume of blessing on what seems dead and dying. Let's spend it now, on what Christ is bringing to new life in and all around us.

Dear Jesus, help me to serve, breath and worship in your death-defeating ways, that the scent of life fills my every day. Amen.

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

Monday, April 4

Hebrews 10:19-25

*“²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart
and with the full assurance that faith brings...”*

I love rules, order and a clear definition of right and wrong, good and bad, which may explain why I love Star Wars so much. The first Star Wars movie showed us that Luke Skywalker is good and Darth Vader is bad! But later in the series these apparently iron-clad concepts falter. Luke is tempted by the dark side. Darth Vader is redeemed and restored to the light. Our world is turned upside down.

Under the old Covenant, there was the comfort of a path to God. It may have been difficult, heavily rule-laden, with guardian priests, temples and curtains, sacrifices and forbidden foods. But the path was there. The rules provided order and compliance and a means and a method. As an engineer, I find this comforting. Rules! Order! A system that defined what was lawful and unlawful. But did this old covenant law actually do what was needed to redeem those who were lost? Not for Gentiles surely, and perhaps not even for the children of Israel.

The book of Hebrews shows how the New Covenant in Christ Jesus, fulfills the old. If we no longer take comfort in the law, if we don't draw close to God, through a temple, rules, priests, and the trappings of the religious order, we are told there is a better way. We have been given a great priest over the house of God, who has torn down the trappings and removed the curtain that separates us from the Love of God. We are reminded to spur each other on, in love and toward good deeds.

It would have been easy for Luke to give up on Darth – but instead he redeemed him and brought him back. It would be easy for us to step back during these Covid times and ignore others who need our help. At City Centre Church, this reminder led us to start a sandwich ministry for the homeless. What we expected to last a few weeks, lasted 18 months and served 70,000 meals.

Let us not give up meeting together but encourage one another. Let us go to God together in the new and living way, in the hope and the promise of the one who is faithful.

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.

Tuesday, April 5

1 John 2: 18-28

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.”

John writes to a small community that is being shattered by false teachers who deny Christ and are causing division in the faith community.

Faced with these adversaries, the author praises the true believers, who are in the truth – thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. John encourages them to stand firm in this truth.

When John tells them, "You know the truth," he is not referring to a mere doctrine or idea. For John, knowing the truth refers to a personal encounter with God through Jesus. This is the genuine truth and is only accessible in the Holy Spirit who affirms Christ's Lordship.

As a result, true believers are those who know Christ and remain steadfast in His truth because they have been anointed by his Spirit.

Today, as we live amid the political divisions, the threat of climate change and a pandemic that is still raging, many people live in fear and confusion.

In the news a few days ago, a journalist complained about the massive problems of disinformation present in social media, saying, "we don't know what is true anymore."

As we face these challenges in our world, John's letter encourages us to put our trust in Jesus, the way the truth and the life.

Lord, guide us with your word and empower us with your Spirit to confront the challenges that the world presents today. In Christ, we trust, Amen.

Daniel Martinez is a student of SAH/VST, associate pastor at St. Andrew's/St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church and Director of Camp Douglas on the Sunshine Coast.

Wednesday, April 6

Luke 18:31-34

*“They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him.
On the third day, he will rise again.”*

Today our Lenten journey finds us with Jesus and his disciples as they tip down from the hill country into Jerusalem. Jesus takes aside his disciples – and us – and attempts to prepare all for what will be ahead.

The ones who choose to follow him need to know the good, the bad, and the ugly. Jesus starts with the bad news. His disciples can't get beyond the awfulness to truly embody the good news about who God is, who Jesus is, and who we are as followers.

Bad news does this, often filling every emotional space available. Like the disciples, we can't get past it to the rest and best of Jesus's message. Such news is even harder to take in when it is beyond the norms of expectation and reason.

You can almost hear the disciples protest, “The dead do not rise!” You can almost hear Jesus say, “But wait, wait, that is not the ending – on the third day, I will rise.”

We often miss hope and faith in our lives, because--right now--the hard reality we experience facing an uncertain future is simply too much. Like Jesus's first disciples, it is not that we are unintelligent, or unfaithful. Rather, in challenging times, we stop too soon and deny ourselves the assurance of Good News.

Listen for the whole, holy message. Our Good News is that Jesus travels with us through it all! Be assured. Our Good News is that Jesus is risen!

As we walk through the last of the hill country toward Jerusalem, Loving God help us to hear all the words of assurance that you have for us, on our journey with Jesus. Amen.

Calvin Burt is a student minister serving at Kings-New Minas Presbyterian Church and is the Presbyterian Chaplain within the Halifax Health Care System.

Thursday, April 7

Psalm 31:9-16

*But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."
My times are in your hand ...*

Loneliness and suffering overwhelm the text of Psalm 31. As we enter Holy Week, this psalm reminds us of Jesus and the nature of his suffering when he was rejected, betrayed, and crucified. Like the psalmist, Jesus was rejected by the people, treated "like a broken vessel," and forgotten "like one who is dead." Even though Jesus lived faithfully in obedience to God, he was despised and rejected by the very ones he came to love and save.

The psalmist is candid about his own life circumstances and lifts them to God in prayer. He makes his problem God's problem and calls on God to intervene. This prayerful psalm gives us permission to fully feel and sit with our distressful realities before moving forward, trusting that God's power and love are at work in our situations. We can live with hope that our futures and all our "times are in [God's] hand." We recall that Jesus' last prayer on the cross was one of committing his spirit into God's hand (Ps. 31:5; Lk 23:46).

Perhaps you have been in dire straits, or you are there now, feeling like there is no possible escape from the suffering you are undergoing, and wondering if you'll make it through to the other side of your troubles. Or maybe God is calling you to walk alongside someone who is suffering and to shine the light of God's face and favor on them? These verses invite us to enter this prayer, expressing our own pain, and the suffering of others, to God.

Breath Prayer
based on v.16:

*Inhale: Let your face shine upon me.
Exhale: Save me in your steadfast love.*

Sumarme Goble is Chaplain and Community Life Director at St. Andrew's Hall.

Friday, April 8

Isaiah 54:9-10

*“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed,
yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken
nor my covenant of peace be removed...”*

As we enter another COVID Lenten season, many of us may feel much like Noah: isolated, afraid and fearful of an uncertain future.

As the waves of the Covid pandemic crash against our own lives, we may be tempted to turn ourselves over to despair.

Yet, Isaiah reminds us that the waters did recede, and the world began anew.

In this passage, the prophet Isaiah reminds us of God's abundant loving mercy and compassion.

While our current lives may be filled with uncertainty, the 'great mercies' spoken about in this passage are reminders that God's mercy and compassion are unending, assured, and active in our lives.

A prayer for today:

*God of eternal mercy and compassion fill us with hope.
Like Noah, we are in uncharted and unsure waters; guide us with your mercy as
the waves crash against us. Help us to emulate and grow from your example of
mercy, fill us, Lord, with your comfort so that we may share it with others.
Forgive us, Lord, when we forget your mercy; forgive us when we fall short of
trusting in you.*

For you ARE merciful!

*We pray you to open our hearts to greater faith and unity with you as we walk
together through these uncertain times.*

We pray all these things in your Son's name,

Amen.

John Carr is a member of the Growing Together churches of St. Aidan's, Gordon and Knox Presbyterian churches. As a candidate for ministry, John's missional outreach focuses on connective media and technologies that bridge the digital divide between faith communities and new members.

Saturday, April 9

Psalm 22:23-31

“For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”

I would often come home from a workday, filled with me listening to my colleagues and having to make decisions. My wife Fiona and I would reconnect as the sun set and she would share with me news of our children, her work and news from her family in Scotland. She would often have to stop me and in an exasperated tone say, *“I don’t want you to offer solutions, I need you to just listen.”*

Perhaps the greatest skill we can possibly possess is to actually listen to our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ and the people we work with each day.

Our God listens to us. Jesus hears us when we cry out to him because of our afflictions, grief, or pain from illness. But he also listens to us when we are celebrating, when we are filled with joy. We are told in scripture that he listens with joy when we worship and praise him.

Validation. It is a buzz word in the therapy world. Therapists tell us that a huge part of their job, when they are listening to their patients, is to validate their feelings.

The Holy Spirit listens and understands us when we can barely form the words to say what we are going through, when our minds and emotions are reeling from what we are experiencing. We are validated.

Our Lord and God listen to us this day, hear us even when we can barely utter the words, may we feel your presence beside us and know you understand. Amen.

Stephen Roche retired as the Chief Financial Officer of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and is a member of the St. Andrew’s Hall Board.

Palm Sunday, April 10

Luke 19:28-41

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, saying, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!" All the elements are not in place. What is needed to root peace in God's good creation hasn't yet taken place. Peace will come to our hearts, our lives, our world, but not through a parade. First the crooked will be made straight, the rough places smooth, a life spent, blood shed, creation will shake to its foundations, then peace will come.

It is an ancient tradition of the church that the palms which are given to churchgoers on Palm Sunday are saved for most of the year. And then, according to custom, they are collected and burned. The ashes from the palms of get used to smudge a cross on the forehead of believers on Ash Wednesday.

Jesus won't accept acclamation from this crowd. He knows the crowd. It makes him weep. They want him to cast off their Roman overlords who occupy their land. They are religious people who want to make use of God. Now that God's Messiah has come, we have the upper hand, they think. Enthroned him and it's our day in the sun. Now is the time, not for peace, but for retaliation. In our tit-for-tat world, the coming of our champion can only mean our turn to rule. The slave changes places with the slave-master, but it is still slavery. That's not peace.

"Hanging on the cross, suffering as an innocent victim," writes theologian Miroslav Volf, "Jesus took upon himself the aggression of the persecutor. He broke the vicious cycle of violence by absorbing it, taking it upon himself. He refused to be sucked into the reflex of revenge but sought to overcome evil by doing good – even at the cost of his life."

Jesus will bring peace. It will come after the palm branches are yellow in the streets of Jerusalem. It will come after our Palm Sunday branches wilt. They will be burned ashen and smeared in the shape of a cross.

O God, give us that peace that only you can impart through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Richard Topping is the President and Vice-Chancellor of the Vancouver School of Theology, and the St. Andrew's Hall Professor of Studies in the Reformed Tradition.

Monday, April 11

John 12:1-11

“Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

Scent is one of the strongest catalysts for memory. I can remember with almost perfect clarity a glorious summer day, riding in the passenger seat of the half ton truck, cruising along a rural road in Dawson Creek. The fragrance of the fields wafted in pleasantly through open window. I immediately thought, “I have to call my father and tell him the Sweet Clover is blooming.” In the next instant I remembered dad had died the previous year. I recognized the scent and linked it in the same moment to an important part of my life.

In the Lenten journey to the cross this passage from John comes before Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, whereas in the lectionary readings it follows. Here is presented an olfactory reminder of the narrative of the previous chapter and a foretelling of a parallel narrative to come in less than a week. The author begins by holding the death of Lazarus in the minds of the reader. Jesus is dining in Lazarus’ home, the friend who Jesus raised from the dead after four days in the tomb. In the Lazarus raising, Jesus is warned of death’s stench, likely so strong that any spices applied to the body would have had little success obscuring it.

Mary is performing an act she had recently done for her brother when he had died. She would have done so with love and devotion, grief and regret, the totality of all emotions experienced when a loved one dies. The scent of nard recalls the same emotional responses as she massages the perfume into Jesus’ feet and wipes the excess away with her hair. Love and devotion and acceptance of the inevitable. She knows how the journey is going to end. When Judas criticizes her for the action, Jesus alludes to what is to come and says, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.”

Mary is not keeping this act of love and devotion for the day of Jesus’ burial; she is not waiting. She is expressing the depth of her affection and dedication in this moment, intuitively knowing there are not many opportunities remaining. Showing love for Jesus is not something to be held until later. Our acts of devotion and discipleship are for in the moment, as the opportunities arise. Like Mary, we may be criticized, given sound arguments in opposition, offered opinions of better ways to use our possessions and talents. I am confident Jesus’ response would be, “Pay them no mind. It is done for love of God, and for neighbour, and for self. I do not intend for you to keep it until later.”

Lord, grant us the sweet scent of your grace as we serve with love and devotion. Amen.

Barbara Pilozow is the Clerk for the Presbytery of Winnipeg. She is currently appointed as Interim Minister at First Presbyterian Church, Winnipeg, and has served as Pastor in Residence at St. Andrew’s Hall.

Tuesday, April 12

1 Corinthians 1: 18-31

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong...”

There are some moments, in the Scriptures as well as in life, that stop us dead in our tracks due to their unflinching honesty. These words by the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth is one of those moments. *“Not many of you were wise by human standards... not many powerful... not many of noble birth...”* In other words: you're nothing special.

And yet, despite this bit of brutal honesty, God chose to work with you. Not because you were special, not because you were wise or because you were strong, but exactly the opposite. *“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”*

As one of my favorite professors, Rev. Dr. Jason Byassee was so fond of saying in class: “God chooses to work in the medium of imperfect people, because that’s all that God has” (it’s even better with his Carolina accent).

Whoever we are, whatever we are as we stand before God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, God knows that we are not who we would prefer ourselves to be. We were not selected for the call of discipleship due to our talents, our abilities, our skills, or anything else; rather, we were selected for this work simply because of what we are: imperfect people.

In the whole history of humanity, there has only been one perfect person, and even he didn't look like anything special at first: born in a manger, raised in the faith and customs of his people, trained in the trade of his earthly father, there was little outward proof that showed Jesus of Nazareth to be what he actually was. At least until he took on our baptism, our temptation, and began teaching and ministering in love to us.

Even though our Master is great, we are still small; though he is wise, we are still foolish; though he is strong, we are still weak. And we always will be. He did not choose us to be his disciples because of our greatness, but only because of his gifts of grace and faith. That is the deal. A deal reckoned to us as faith and to the world as foolishness. However, we would be beyond foolish to reject it.

This deal, this life of faith, this calling to witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the one thing in this world that brings eternal life. It is the one thing in this world that can redeem the world's sin, the one thing in this world worth giving our lives over to, even if these lives are, in fact, nothing special.

Dear Lord, thank you for making us all we need to be in our baptism. Help us to glorify you as imperfect people longing to see your kingdom. Amen.

Roberto DeSandoli is a SAH/VST grad and Minister at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon.

Wednesday, April 13

Hebrews 12:1-3

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Some days are full of things (and people!) that can chip away at us, making us so weary, tempting us to throw our hands up and check out of that to which we've been called.

On those days, the author of Hebrews encourages us to know there's more than what we see or feel.

Our weariness is real, but there are other things to hold and consider to be just as real. We're not the first to struggle, and as such, we are in good company; we're on the same team as every other person who ever trusted God to lead them well. Best of all Jesus is the one who will lead us through, and to whom we turn to find our joy.

I'm writing this in January, a few days removed from nearly 40 cm of snow that covered Toronto over one night leaving us with sore backs, closures and problems. I asked someone who just moved to Canada from Lebanon, what he thought of all the snow. At first he thought he was dreaming. He then shared how beautiful it was to see the world outside look completely different, clean and pure. Problems, yes; but beauty, too.

On Holy Wednesday, we remember Jesus fed and cleaned his friends knowing he would be betrayed by one of them. Pain of betrayal, yes; but love too.

In Jesus, there's always more to see.

Faithful God, help us to look to Jesus throughout this day, so that we might rejoice and persevere in all you call us to. Amen.

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

Thursday, April 14

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

*“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”*

Every time we eat bread and drink from the cup of thanksgiving at Holy Communion, we are remembering and agreeing that because of the love of Christ who gave His body and blood, we are now in a new covenant with God.

We live in anticipation of Christ's return. While waiting for Him as a church, as the body of Christ, we show the world how sacrificial love can really make a big difference in life.

That is what it means to proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Today, we recall the mandates that the Lord Jesus gave to His church. He washed the feet of the disciples as a mandate also for us to show real service to one another.

He gave new meaning to the bread and the cup of thanksgiving as a sign of His loving work on the cross. We live today deeper into the meaning of life that Jesus has redeemed and opened for all humanity by living a sacrificial love according to His love.

Jesus says he will come again, so that we may live in vigilance and hope that the power of His love is manifest and will make all things perfect in His time.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You that we are called to remember the high price that Jesus paid for our sin and for our communal remembrance at the communion table. Help us to show your sacrificial love to the world, until You comes again. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

Astrid Melatunan is a VST student. She is doing her first year in Master of Divinity Program, particularly in Presbyterian Studies.

Friday, April 15

Isaiah 52: 13-53: 12

*“He was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;”*

Isaiah in this 4th Servant song describes the suffering servant as the Messiah of God. This song describes Jesus Christ who was obedient unto death and whose death brought life to humanity. In this powerful servant song God actively loved the world through Jesus who gave His life for our peace.

The Children of Israel are in the midst of exile, and they are suffering an immense amount of humiliation and pain. In this suffering, Isaiah prophesies of a time to come when they and their descendants would experience relief through the help of the suffering servant, JESUS.

Like they did for the Israelites these poignant words pierce our hearts this Good Friday. The sinless Son of God endured affliction; was bruised; pierced and crushed with wounds that we should have received; death that we deserved. The burden of our sin was laid upon the sinless Son of God, Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer.

Jesus suffered cruelty on the cross and gave-up His life, so that all who believe in Him might receive eternal peace with God. This is good news for those who have experienced trials and are crushed in spirit; good news for those who are bruised by tragedies caused by this pandemic.

The Lord Jesus by His punishment, death and resurrection paid the enormous price and broke the power of sin and death forever. Jesus paid it all.

Heavenly Father, thank You that the Lord Jesus Christ through his wounds, piercing, death, and resurrection has removed the weight of sin and suffering from our lives. Amen.

Germaine Lovelace is the minister at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Malton Mississauga. He is a graduate of Vancouver School of Theology and serves on the Healing and Reconciliation Advisory Committee.

Saturday, April 16

Psalm 31: 1-4, 15-16

“In you, Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame...”

Sometimes, simply being human is really hard. As I read through Psalm 31, I heard the psalmist emphasizing both supplication and praise to God. In that sense, this psalm is a typical prayer for me – supplication and praise.

During the Christmas and New Year’s long weekends, I spent quite a few hours self-isolating and indulging in sweets and Netflix films. Maybe you also stayed home and watched movies? “Last Christmas” was one of the Christmas movies I watched. It is a secular, holiday movie, and the screenplay probably will not receive many awards. Kate, the main character, is an employee of a Christmas decorations shop and is going through tough times with her health and her own family. Tom, a mysterious guy, appeared and reappeared out of blue and tried to convince her to be nice to others. When he consoled her, Tom said *“Just to be a human being is hard really hard”*. And I suddenly started thinking what the difference is between Christians and non-Christians when everything seems falling apart.

We continuously confront challenges, whether small or big, and often reluctantly admit our powerlessness, as we lose control over things troubling us. I always remember what the late minister of my church in Korea preached: Christianity is a religion of NEVERTHELESS. Nevertheless, in the midst of crisis, we Christians shall still rise from desperation to confidence and from despair to joy of deliverance when our worries and fears are lifted to God. We have been privileged to experience this grace through troubles. Now I see Psalm 31 as a confession of our trust, praising Him as our Lord, nevertheless!

As Jesus surrendered himself on the cross, we commit ourselves to God as His children!

*Dear Lord, as we wait on this Holy Saturday for the joy of resurrection, help us to wait and watch for your goodness in the world and share your love with all.
Amen.*

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

Easter Sunday, April 17

Luke 24: 1-12

*“Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶
He is not here; he has risen!”*

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed – Hallelujah! Happy Easter friends of St. Andrew’s Hall. What a wonderful journey we’ve been on over these past forty days. Darrell Guder started our time together back on Ash Wednesday with a reminder that “the observance of Lent is one of Christianity’s oldest ‘pious practices.’” How has this most recent season of Lent helped shape your sanctified imagination for following Jesus out into the world he died to save? How has your daily reflection on God’s Word helped empower you to know yourself as “saved to be sent,” as a witness participating in God’s reconciling ministry?

As we come once more to the familiar and transformative Easter story in Scripture, we read about the original followers of Jesus being disorientated, surprised, and confused in light of the empty tomb. With two thousand years of systematic theology and church tradition behind us, it can be harder for us to feel the same sense of shock at what God accomplished for the world in empty cradle, cross and tomb. And yet, in this post-Christendom Canadian landscape there are more and more of our affable agnostic neighbours for whom the resurrection story is as unfamiliar and startling as it was for those first disciples. There’s something I almost envy in that “unknowing.” Imagine, being shocked and swept off your feet again for the first time with the discovery that God really was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself and not counting our sins against us. Wow!

At St. Andrew’s Hall, we delight in building a residential, learning community year after year that seeks to proclaim and live the grace, love and freedom granted to us in Christ’s resurrection. You are part of that community, and part of Christ’s family we call the church. On this Easter Sunday let us rejoice together and seek to tell those who do not yet know that Christ has set us free from sin and death to live as cheerful witnesses of God’s grace in the world. As John Calvin said, “through his death, sin was wiped out and death extinguished; through his resurrection, righteousness was restored, and life raised up.”

Risen Lord Jesus, we glorify you on this day of days. We praise you that your dying and rising has given us new life. Help us to share this good news with others today and always. Help us to proclaim your goodness and embrace the power of your resurrection, for you alone can disempower our depravity and enliven us by grace. Amen.

Ross Lockhart is Dean of St. Andrew’s Hall and Professor of Mission Studies at Vancouver School of Theology.

Notes



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