

Blessed Trinity Lutheran Church at Rosemont

DAILY MEDITATIONS — MARCH, 2025

March 1, 2025

(Jesus said) “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

Matthew 5:44

Lent, which begins this month, invites us to look at our lives, at our souls; especially to look at those dark corners where ugly thoughts might be lurking. For several years, at my former church, we said these words in the prayers for Ash Wednesday: “We repent of our false judgments, our uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us.” Those words seemed to describe much of the negativity that was, and still is, so rampant in our country and in the world. Most of us think those words don’t apply to us. We’d never feel prejudice or contempt. But here’s a reality check: picture the person or persons you have, for whatever reason, most disliked – perhaps even hated – in your life. Now, picture them standing before Jesus, with Jesus smiling at them, welcoming and embracing them, calling them his beloved ones. For most of us, that would be a jarring disconnect. “Him? Her?? Them???” Our human feelings would probably have us thinking, “They don’t deserve that! They’re terrible people. They hurt me so much! They hurt my family!” But God sees people – sees all of us – very differently from how we see each other. The sibling we know as toxic is nevertheless loved by God. The parent with whom we’ve had a distant or broken relationship is beloved by God. The spouse who cheated on us, or the lover who abandoned us, is loved by God just as much as we are. The boss who fired us just to save money is also God’s child. And surely, those we despise or denounce because they are from other cultures or countries are, and always will be, God’s children, as are the people whose views are so different from ours that we almost can’t talk to them. This does not mean that God condones or approves the infliction of pain, the use of violence, or wanton sinfulness. What this image of our enemies standing before Christ does convey is the fact that, while we can’t understand the depth of such love, it is a love that God holds out to all of us. Recognizing this truth may enable us to authentically turn from prejudice and contempt, from judgmental or uncharitable thoughts, to the love God gives us to share. *“Lord, I turn my negative feelings, reactions, and memories over to you. Cleanse my thoughts and my heart. Help me to love as you love, and until I can get to that point, help me to at least make room in my heart, so that kindness and forgiveness may enter in.”*

March 2, 2025

Christ was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.

1 Peter 1:20

Time can be a difficult, confusing concept in Scripture. We know that in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), references to time are not literal; ‘100 years’ might simply mean ‘a long time’. And we know that the ways in which we measure time in our earthly lives are not the way time is measured – if it is measured at all – in the life to come. We know that in some way, Christ existed as part of God before he was born as a human being, and we know that Christ lives now and forever. But the details of how these things happen, across the panorama of time and the universe, can be difficult to understand. Knowing precisely how all of this happens is not as important as being open to the belief that it does; knowing that God is the same ‘yesterday, today, and tomorrow’, and that all of time is in God’s hands. We can trust in God the Father, Christ our Savior, and the Holy Spirit with us. Always.

March 3, 2025

Don’t worry about anything, instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don’t forget to thank him for his answers.

Philippians 4:6 (TLB)

Like all people, I am very human and very flawed. I don’t know which I do more— exasperate God or make God laugh. In January, a municipal snowplow accidentally damaged the four mailboxes across from my home, mine included. Mine was actually in the best shape. It was still on the post. Two of the boxes were tilted at odd angles, another was lying in a snow bank, knocked off its post. Township crews came to repair the damage, but after they

finished, my mailbox was in the worst shape. The brace beneath the box had been removed, apparently taken to support the box that had been in the snow bank. While the other mailboxes were anchored to their posts, mine was hanging limply by one bolt. It seemed that the workers had made some repairs but left my mailbox to fend for itself. In minutes, I worked myself into a fit. Yes, I knew that, in comparison to the devastation of wildfires, a damaged mailbox is nothing. But my mind spun in circles, wondering where I could find an identical brace for the box, how much would it cost to buy and affix that new brace, who would do the work? I went to the Township building the next morning, prepared for a confrontation I didn't want. I told myself to be friendly and cooperative, but dollar signs and questions kept spinning in my head. I explained my problem to the receptionist and asked to speak to the Director of Public Works. She made a phone call, and a smiling young man came out of an office. He shook my hand and said, "I'm so glad you came. I was going to contact you today. We needed to use your brace to put your neighbor's box on the post, and we're making a new brace for you. But, by law, we need your permission to remove your mailbox in order to do those repairs. Will you allow us to remove the box in order to finish fixing it?" I just stared at him. "May I hug you?" I asked. He laughed and we hugged. My mailbox was fixed by the end of the day. How often do we fret and worry about something that God already has under control? It seems that I, at least, have to learn that lesson over and over again. (See March 4th, below.) On the way home, I thanked God and apologized for my foolishness. Blessedly, I sensed a smile, then a laugh, and I thanked God again ... this time for his endless patience with me.

March 4, 2025

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. Nahum 1:7

It's an old saying: "If it isn't one thing, it's another." Many of us have said those words in times of stress. Usually, it's a series of unpleasant surprises or problems that upsets us. When situations are bigger or more critical, we can be scared as well as stunned by the next 'thing' that hits us. For me, the happily resolved mailbox issue was followed immediately by my refrigerator suddenly being warm. The repair service suggested an adjustment, and everything seemed to be fine. The next day, my insurance company representative called, asking, "Did you make a payment on your homeowner's insurance?" I had, but they had no record of it. My check register and duplicate check showed the payment, but at that moment I couldn't find the receipt I'd gotten. Staff at the office remembered that I had paid, well before the due date, but the national office had no record of payment. I went to the bank the next day. They said the check was uncashed, probably lost, and they put a stop-payment on the original check. I wrote a second check and got a new receipt. But when I got home that day, my refrigerator was again dangerously into the 'warm' mark. I felt like a tennis ball being smacked from one frustration to the next. That night, I read a spiritual magazine in which a writer said, "You have to let go of the idea that you're in control." Of course. I reminded myself that my anxiety was related to that old fallacy: the illusion of control. Good thing I calmed myself, because after shopping for a new refrigerator, I had only a few days of peace until, on the day before the new refrigerator was to be delivered, I got two letters from the insurance company. The first said that, unless I paid my home insurance by February 28, it would be cancelled, and the second letter said that attempts to get a payment from my checking account had failed 'because the bank doesn't recognize your name and has no accounts listed for you.' My blood froze. I assumed that letter referred to monthly withdrawals for car insurance, and it terrified me. There was no money in my account??? The bank didn't know me??? I read those letters at 6:00 p.m., vowing to be at the bank at 9:00 the next morning. From there I'd go to the insurance company, and return home for my afternoon refrigerator delivery. But at 8:15 the next morning, the appliance store called and said that my refrigerator would be delivered between 8:30 and 10:00. All went well with the delivery, and I was at the bank by 10:30. My account had not been scammed/drained, as I'd feared, and my next stop was the insurance office. Both letters had referred to the homeowner's policy, and both were sent in error. By Noon, all was resolved, but I felt beaten up. None of this was as critical as a health or safety issue, but it was a reminder that, every day, life just happens, and sometimes what happens turns life upside down. But the flip side of not having control is the recognition of Who is in control. *"Thank you, Lord, for your rescues and for always being in control."*

March 5, 2025 — Ash Wednesday

What man can live and not see death?

Psalm 89:48

Today, many Christians will go to church for the 'imposition of ashes', the placement of a thumbprint of ashes on our foreheads. We will be told 'From dust you came, and to dust you will return.' That truth is especially poignant for those who have recently lost friends or family members. The death of one member of our church was so sudden, so

startling, that it still doesn't seem real. That woman's passing struck a chord deep within me— the realization that we know 'neither the day nor the hour'. At the same time, two articles, in two magazines, added to this perspective. One article, in a news magazine, referred to a recent discovery at the ancient site of Pompeii in Italy. In 79 AD, Mt. Vesuvius erupted and destroyed the city of Pompeii and its inhabitants. The recent discovery of a long-buried 'bathing room', in what had been a luxurious home, revealed skeletal remains of several people preparing to enjoy bathing in an indoor pool, a pool covered in mosaic tiles and gilded decorations. The people were trapped in place, dying instantly, in the volcano's eruption. In another magazine, police in a European country announced that they were reopening an investigation into the decades-old death of a wealthy socialite. Known for her beauty as much as her wealth, the woman and her assistant had visited a home she was renovating, then drove into a mountainous region. Perhaps they didn't know that a massive snow storm was headed that way. Their car was found several weeks later; their remains were found two years later. These unnerving accounts reflect an inescapable reality: death comes to each of us, and neither wealth nor beauty nor position can stave off the arrival of death. "From dust you came and to dust you shall return." Accepting that reality, and believing that life itself does not end, is our path to peace, even in loss.

March 6, 2025

She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well."

Mark 5:27-28, 34

This is one of the best-known passages in the Bible, and for good reason. We can see the scene so clearly: an elderly woman – bent with age and frailty – approaches Jesus, the famous preacher and healer. She is timid but determined. She has been so sick for so long! Surely, he won't mind ... he won't even know ... if she simply touches his robe. But when she reaches out and her hand actually touches the hem of Jesus's robe, he turns around. He felt something. He felt that familiar jolt of power going through him and from him. He asks who touched him. The old woman knows he means her and she steps forward. Will he rebuke her? Punish her somehow? No, his eyes are filled with love. He looks at her with kindness and understanding and says, "... your faith has made you well." For that moment, Jesus is looking only at her. She is healed, and her faith is affirmed. Today, in this moment, you can reach out to the same Jesus, for whatever help or healing you need. Jesus has not changed. He is still here. And he is looking only at you.

March 7, 2025

In distress you called and I rescued you.

Psalm 81:7

This verse is a natural follow-up to yesterday's reading. It is also a reminder of something very important— the need to remember and to give thanks. In a well-known passage in the New Testament, Jesus heals ten lepers. In joy and relief, they go on their way, happy to be made clean and whole again. One of them ... only one ... returns to thank Jesus for his healing. We can be sure that he remembered Jesus all of his life. When we receive a special blessing, when we have been rescued or restored in some way, we should thank God for his grace, and we should always, always remember God's goodness to us. Many people write in journals, recording everyday life, special moments, or their spiritual journey. Many keep prayer journals. Some write notes in their Bibles. The method we use to record and remember God's blessings in our lives matters less than the fact that we do remember ... and thank God for them.

March 8, 2025

Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

1 John 2:8

Daylight Savings Time begins tomorrow; more light in daytime hours. For most of us, a welcome change. A few years ago, in winter, I attended a late afternoon meeting in a part of town I didn't know well. I was unfamiliar with the area's side streets. I found the meeting location, but when the meeting ended, it was dark outside, the kind of dark that seems deeper in winter. I drove onto a side street leading to a main street, a street I thought I knew well. But all of the markers – store fronts, street signs – that were familiar to me during the day now seemed lost in the glare of neon signs and street lights. 'Darkness changes everything,' I thought. I felt uncertain. I knew I was on the right road, and yet I drove slowly, careful to look for the streets that would lead me back to the area where I live. As I drove, I thought of today's verse, and I knew the words didn't only apply to the onset of nighttime. A day or so before that meeting, my

usually sunny outlook had been overshadowed by grey clouds of doubt, and by free-floating anxiety. Those dark thoughts changed everything, from my moods to my energy levels. Darkness changes everything. We all have down times; moments of sadness and even despair. No life is perpetually sunny. But darkness is as real as sunlight. We know when it has descended upon us, just as we know when night comes. Whatever the reasons for our times of darkness, we must deal with the dark and choose to move toward the light, toward the sunshine, toward God's Light—the Light of God's presence, love, and will. Darkness changes everything. We can't let it change us.

March 9, 2025

How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. Gen. 28:17

The recent unveiling of the restored cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris stirred hearts and triggered tears all over the world. The cathedral, built in 1163, was massively damaged by a fire in 2019. We can't comprehend the incalculable hours and toil that went into the building of the original cathedral, or the devotion that propelled so many workers to do everything from moving marble to carving wood to creating stained glass windows for the restored cathedral. Churches, temples, and places of worship are sacred to us. The great cathedrals of Europe, with their magnificent art and architecture, and the ancient temples of the East, with their extraordinary sculptures and structures, can leave us breathless. For Native Americans, the sight of the Great Plains, the Grand Canyon, the Montana sky, and the power and beauty of nature are all awesome, connecting them to their deep spirituality. It's good to be awed, to stand speechless in front of something that takes our breath away. Any place of worship ... even the simplest chapel, any place where we seek God ... can do that when we remember that this is "the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

March 10, 2025

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath.

Psalm 6:1

We know when we've done something wrong, or when we failed to do something right. Most of our transgressions are not enormous. We do not commit crimes. We do not start wars or destroy nature. But we do other things that we know are wrong: we don't forgive, we fail to show our love, we don't offer to help when we know we're needed, we gossip about others' flaws or gloat about others' failings, we give as little as we have to give instead of as much as we can, we behave as if the world revolved around us, and we hold our pains and rejections close to us— as if we'd rather be victims, burdened by sorrow, than be free to rejoice. We are such complicated, flawed creatures. God sees. God understands. God waits for us to say, "O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath."

March 11, 2025

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23

Sometimes it's hard to hold onto hope. No matter how strong our faith is or how sincerely we pray, when our lives are deeply troubled or when our hearts ache, we can be frightened or unsure. Maybe we flat-out can't believe that there will be an end to our troubles, or an answer to our prayers. That's when the words of Scripture, and the experience of other Christians, can help us. When we can't see light on our own path, perhaps we can see the light that shined for others. When we're filled with doubt, we can turn to those who've been filled with faith, whether they are people we know, or people in the Bible, or authors of devotional books we can read. Even if our faith is shaky, even if it is gone, God's faithfulness to us is still there. It always has been, it always will be. Even in our darkness, we can look to the light that is God. God has promised, God is faithful. Even when our faith fails, God's faithfulness does not.

March 12, 2025

The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

The woman from our congregation who died suddenly last month was active in the church and in the community. She could be called a super volunteer. I didn't know her well, but I was peripherally connected to a project for which she was the key organizer. She probably couldn't calculate the number of hours she devoted to that project, year after year. I frequently told her that she should be very proud of her accomplishments. "This program simply wouldn't

happen without you,” I’d say, and she’d blush and mumble a thank-you. I’m glad I said that to her, but now I wish I’d said it more often, and about more things she made possible. She could be intense and ultra-focused, but her heart was in the right place, and she was willing to help with anything. In today’s world, just having a heart that’s in the right place is all too rare. So often we take people for granted, especially those who are always around, always helping, always there for us. Too seldom do we say ‘Thank you’, ‘Well done!’, or “I appreciate you”. We forget about these kindnesses because we’re so accustomed to people simply being there ... until they aren’t. Until there’s no answer when we phone. Until there’s an empty chair at the table, an empty place in the meeting room, an empty space in the pew. Lent invites us to silence and to contemplating deep thoughts. Let us, in this holy season, think about how we can show our thanks, our love, and our appreciation to more people, more often, while they are still with us.

March 13, 2025

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

1 Peter 5:14

Peace is mentioned many times in the Bible. Prophets of the Old Testament asked God for peace for their people. Jesus spoke of peace. His disciples left their peace on those to whom they spoke. Along with love, peace is one of the most exalted concepts in Scripture. In many places of worship, people ‘share the sign of peace’ with each other. Why do we do this? Perhaps it is because we know, deep inside, that peace, like love, is one of the greatest gifts. Without peace in our hearts, we can’t recognize our blessings. When we’re not at peace, we feel sick somehow, even if we’re in good health. When we have no peace, our assets, our possessions, even our health mean nothing to us. Peter was right when he gave today’s blessing: “Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”

March 14, 2025

You have set all the borders of the earth; you have made summer and winter.

Psalms 74:17

The date was January 5th. I’d gone to a large, regional department store to see if they still had after-Christmas sale items. I came through the door and, as always, saw displays of pajamas in front of me, the shoe department to my right, and women’s clothing to my left as I headed toward the escalator. Suddenly, like some absurd mirage, I saw, in front of me, large racks of women’s bathing suits. I blinked, but the sight was real. I went over to the racks and looked at the bathing suits. They were real; 2025 designs, not leftovers from last year’s stock. Bathing suits. On January 5th. I not only smiled, I laughed out loud, and my soul soared. It was a welcome, wonderful, and completely unexpected reminder of the warm and sunny days to come. As ridiculous as their presence seemed in January, the bathing suits felt like a blessing, like a reminder that winter’s grip would weaken, and that summer, sunshine, and sunbathing were on their way. It made my day. I found myself smiling and feeling chipper, energetic, and hopeful all day long. We probably have such reminders of good things – currently or to come – around us all the time. We just fail to notice them. The ability to notice, to be aware, to be receptive and open to the signs God places around us, and the words God whispers in our hearts, can be cultivated, expanded, sharpened. It is a skill we would be wise to develop, so that we can see the blessings and messages around us ... even on store displays.

March 15, 2025

For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.

1 Samuel 16:7

This year, the Penn State football team played in a semi-final game of the national championship series. Penn State lost. It was a close game, with Penn State losing by only three points. Nevertheless, they lost. I was sorry about that loss, but as the dejected players left the field, I thought, “Only four teams in the nation made it to the semi-final level.” It’s a shame they lost, but being one of the top four teams in the country is remarkable. Of course, we know the goal is to win. We understand that team members and coaches can feel heartbreaking disappointment. But we also know – we hope – that with time and perspective, they will realize what an extraordinary, admirable season they had; one in which they should take pride for a lifetime. So often, we don’t know, we don’t realize, the enormous value and impact of what we have said and done in life; the way we’ve touched other people’s lives, the examples we’ve set, the love we’ve shown. Aspiring to be the best – to winning athletic contests, getting good grades, getting promotions, leading projects or organizations – is fine. But not being #1 should never obliterate our appreciation for all that we have achieved ... for the very fine work done by God when he created us in his love, for his purposes. We’re all #1 to God.

March 16, 2025

Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.

Psalm 119:165

It's a wonderful thing to be innocent, blameless. Imagine the relief you feel when something bad happens and you know "I didn't do it." It just feels good to be on the right side of the law— man's law and God's law. We may be flawed as human beings, and we all make mistakes and wrong choices. Bad things can happen. But when we 'love God's law' ... when we try to live according to God's commandments and Christ's teachings ... we have a security that nothing else can match. We know we're choosing wisely, we know we're making the right choice. We choose to live in the light of God's love, and to live in accordance with God's law. When we make that choice, we're on solid ground. Many things may go wrong, life will still have troubles and pain, but nothing can "make us stumble".

March 17, 2025

I call upon God, and the Lord will save me.

Psalm 55:16

Today is St. Patrick's Day. Behind the secular celebrations, of course, is a real story, the story of a remarkable man. Patrick was born in Britain in the fourth century AD, to a Catholic family. 'Raiders', criminals we might call pirates, stole Patrick from his home when he was 16 and took him to Ireland. Patrick was presumably sold to someone to do field labor and herding. For six years Patrick toiled in Ireland, holding steadfast to his faith. In his early twenties, he escaped and returned to England, wandering for weeks, hungry and ill, before making his way home. He then had a vision calling him back to Ireland to convert people to Christianity. In Ireland, he worked tirelessly to spread Christ's teachings. At times in trouble with noblemen and at times in trouble with the church, Patrick continued his work with a focus on truth and simplicity. Patrick only wrote two books in his life, but a scholar, critical of Patrick's work but impressed with the man, wrote, "The moral and spiritual greatness of the man shines through every sentence of his rustic Latin." There must have been many times when Patrick said the words of today's Psalm: "I call upon God, and the Lord will save me." Patrick's humility was as deep as his faith, and sixteen centuries later we remember him.

March 18, 2025

Show mercy and compassion for others

Luke 6: 36

When horrific wildfires broke out in California in January, most of us felt shock and sorrow as we watched the devastation unfold. Perhaps we also felt something else, something deep, something not on the surface of our awareness or our thinking. Perhaps it was the realization that no one, anywhere, is immune to tragedy or loss. It's easy to have the illusion that those who are wealthy or powerful – the kind of people who have body guards and billions of dollars – are somehow insulated from the troubles that are common to everyone else. Certainly, wealth provides undeniable advantages in life: protection from hunger, homelessness, and lack of medical care. But wealth can't put out a fire. It can't call rain down from the skies. It can't stop the raging winds, and it can't hold up a house that is collapsing into rubble. All the wealth in the world couldn't have prevented those fires or the destruction they brought. Natural disasters – just like illness, heartache, and loss – are great levelers. They can strike all people, everywhere. Large scale disasters have large scale effects. Perhaps much will be learned from this disaster. One thing we learned is that no one is immune to tragedy, and when disaster strikes, we must all be here for each other.

March 19, 2025

On God we have set our hope that he will rescue us again.

2 Corinthians 1:10

Most of us have had 'passes' that entitled us to a certain number of uses. A season pass to the home games at a college or university allows us to attend those games. City bus passes for students, from 1950s and '60s school days, allowed us twenty rides on a city bus to get to school, and the driver would punch the card every time we got on. When the card was fully punched, it couldn't be used anymore. Even coupons in the newspaper have expiration dates. If that date passes, the coupon can't be used any longer. Fortunately for us, God doesn't operate that way. There are no limits to the number of times we can turn to God and ask him for help, and God's love for us has no expiration date. Even if we ask God to rescue us "again" ... even again and again ... God will be there for us. *"Thank you, Lord, for your endless love, your numberless rescues ... with no punches on pass cards, and no expiration dates."*

March 20, 2025

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light, we see light.

Psalm 36:9

March 20th. The first day of spring. In early January, I poked around the dried stalks, stems, and shrubs in my garden, as I do every January. I was looking, once again, for signs of green, for ridiculously early appearances of the tips of spring plants. I was skeptical about finding anything this year. The last few winters have been mild, but this January had been bitter cold, and the ‘real feel’ temperatures often dropped to zero. I doubted that I’d see any green in January this year. ‘O ye of little faith.’ Near the hinoki cypress to the right of my front porch I saw a half-inch cluster of bright green leaves; a lily, I think. On the other side of the porch, an inch or so of various tulip leaves had broken through the soil. Near the garage, little stubs of green, about the size of pencil erasers, were visible. They will be hyacinths. But the biggest surprise was the 3”-4” of daffodil leaves standing tall all over the garden in front of my home. “You’re showing off!” I said to them, “because you know you’re my favorites.” That garden area is very exposed to the wind, snow, and ice. I took large scoops of soil over to the daffodils to insulate them a bit more from the cold to come. Maybe this green-in-January is one of nature’s biggest surprises, and one we need very much. The sight of green in January shows us that even when it is bitter cold, even when the weather is harsh, new life boldly thrusts itself forward. In the same way, even when our lives are at their lowest point, in the winters of our hopelessness or heartache, new life is being created in our circumstances and in us. Poet Dylan Thomas wrote of “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” Perhaps that’s why some people envision God as a Force— an intentional Force of love and creation, always a Force of new life, in our gardens, in our lives, and in us.

March 21, 2025

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

1 Corinthians 16:13

In a letter to the editor, a writer noted that currently, and throughout history, *“It seems to be one man who creates chaos and conflict: one man in Russia, one man in the Middle East, one man here, one man there. All of the deaths and destruction, displacements, disruptions, and upheavals. One man, just one man. It is only ever one man. Why is it so hard to stop one man?”* The question is thought-provoking. History and the Bible give us many examples. From the Bible: Haman, Cain, Herod, Abimelech, Delilah, Lot, Jephtha, Herodias, Jezebel, Judas and others. From secular history: Ivan the Terrible, Atilla the Hun, Vlad the Impaler, Hitler, Stalin, the perpetrators of the Inquisition, and so many more. It is so often one man, one person, who unleashes the forces of evil; one person whose unquenchable thirst for power leads to the deaths of millions and misery for millions more. One man, one person, can order or persuade others to follow, and that one person’s evil infects those others. But history and the Bible also show us something else. One man, one person, can stand up to evil and injustice: Noah, Daniel, Joseph the son of Jacob, Esther, Jesus. One person of courage and honor can speak out against violence, inhumanity, tyranny, and injustice. One martyr, John Hus, opened doors for others, like Martin Luther, to follow, and Christianity was changed forever. During and after the U.S. Civil War, countless known and unknown persons relieved the misery and saved the lives of those persecuted. In the Holocaust, many put their own lives in danger to save others, one person at a time. One dedicated man, one dedicated woman, working in a laboratory for years, discovers treatments and cures that save millions of lives. One teacher touches thousands of lives in a career. One person of courage, conviction, and decency can accomplish great good. In this season, we focus on Jesus, one man, but also Son and Savior.

March 22, 2025

In distress you called and I answered you.

Psalm 81:7

Sometimes God has to remind us that he has been with us throughout our lives. God knew us before we were born. He knows us better than we know ourselves. The Bible tells us, again and again, that God is with us and hears us, but we still forget it. Even those of us who have been blessed with remarkable healing, great love, wonderful families, or satisfying work to do, can forget how good God has been to us. Today’s verse reminds us that when we’ve been in distress, God answered us, and that same verse assures us that he will answer us in the future. *“Thank you, Father, for the blessings of yesterday, today, and the blessings that will come tomorrow. Thank you— always, and for everything.”*

March 23, 2025

Jesus said, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Luke 10:2

Farmers know that when crops are ready, hands are needed to gather the harvest. The crops will go to waste if they can't be harvested in time. Laborers are vital, critical workers. In our time as in Jesus's time, the word 'laborer' is often synonymous with the lowest level of worker. In truth, we are all laborers, we are all workers, no matter what our jobs, our titles, our ranks, or our workplaces. The very concept of labor is to be revered. When we work, we not only help the world to function and to move forward, we also help to fulfill God's purposes for us. When we are willing to work for God's needs on earth – helping with the ministries of the church, providing aid to those in need, extending love and hospitality to those at the margins of life – we are doing God's own work. There are so many places where God's harvest is ready; so many places where our work will touch the lives of others ... touch the world ... in a positive way. Let us labor willingly to bring God's love and peace more fully into our church, our community, and our world.

March 24, 2025

Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

Even with regular Bible reading and worship, with childhood attendance at Sunday School and adult participation in Bible study, it can be difficult to understand who Jesus truly is. But the season of Lent gives us an opportunity to hear Jesus's words anew, to consider his actions, to see him in situations that are soul elevating, like his entry into Jerusalem, and soul crushing, as was his crucifixion. ("My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?") So much about the human Jesus, and the divinity of Jesus, is a combination of the mysterious and the miraculous, requiring faith and openness from us rather than intellectual analysis. One of the fascinating and compelling things about Jesus is that he seemed to know – to feel, to understand – what people were experiencing. He knew all about the woman at the well, although he had never seen her before. He knew what was in the heart of the tax collector. He could see Judas's intent before it was put into motion. Surely, he saw through Pilate's posturing and into his very soul. There is nothing – *nothing* – that Jesus can't understand about us or our lives. There is no heartache, no confusion, no pain or suffering that he cannot feel with us. Of the many things revealed to us in Lent, about this extraordinary man, one of the most important is his oneness with us. In whatever ways life has hurt us or failed us, whatever our fears for the present or the future, Jesus understands. More than that, he says, "I am with you always ...", the last message he left to his disciples and to us. As we pursue our Lenten journey, let it be with the awareness that God – Jesus – is with us, as close as our own breath, as deep within us as our own heartbeat. Rest in that oneness. Surrender your cares to it. Let Jesus hold you, this day, this season, and always. Be at peace. "My peace I give to you."

March 25, 2025

Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the Lord alone guided him. Deuteronomy 32:11-12

From the time when humans began to be thinking, questioning, creative beings, they have looked to nature and seen signs and symbols that helped them to understand themselves and the world. Many gardeners know that they are performing an act of faith when they plant seeds or bulbs into ground that will be covered with snow and hardened with frost. They know that spring will come, and crops, fruits, and flowers will appear. People in sorrow, who look up into a cloudy sky, know that the sun is still there, behind the clouds, hidden for a time but not gone. Those who stand at the edge of the sea and feel the rhythm of the tides know that the moon which pulls the water at their feet is in harmony with the flow of tides in oceans all over the world. Nature can tell us a lot about faith, about the Creator, about life and our place in this world and the next. Just as the eagle hovers over, protects, and guides its young, so God watches over, guards, and guides us.

March 26, 2025

He will not allow your foot to be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber ... The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore. Psalm 121: 3, 8

I've just concluded physical therapy sessions designed to relieve my back pain. In those sessions, the physical therapist included exercises for balance. I was surprised, because balance and agility are two of my strengths. But the therapist explained that balance is a 'use-it-or-lose-it' ability. You have to keep working at it to maintain it. I was fine with the first exercises, done while standing on the floor or on a wooden track. But then he introduced the 3" foam mat. Balancing on foam is not like balancing yourself on a solid floor. It feels like standing on marshmallows. The clincher came when the therapist said, "Now close your eyes." Oh, my! It felt as if I had no idea where I was. All my confidence – no, my conceit – about having great balance flew out the window. I never knew how much our eyesight is connected to our bodies; never knew how much we rely on our sight to remain physically oriented, stabilized, centered. In time, I became more accustomed to the more demanding exercises, but always ... always ... doing them with my eyes closed brought an immediate sense of uncertainty, even when I was keeping my balance. Of course, the comparison to our larger lives was obvious— if we can't see ourselves in relationship to something ... or Someone ... solid, stable, centered, and unchanging, we can feel insecure and unsteady. We don't quite know where we are, where we stand, where we are in relationship to other people and things. It's an unpleasant and disorienting feeling in an exercise room and also in life. Whatever our ages or situations, we need to have a point of reference for decision-making and evaluating, for knowing right from wrong, knowing what to do, what to choose, what to believe. In the midst of life's twists and turns, we need something we know is true and trustworthy; honest and honorable; positive, not negative. In the therapy center, when I did my balancing exercises with my eyes open, I had windows, doors, and framed posters on the walls as reference points. Though I was unaware of it, those visual cues told me where my body was, where I was, in relation to the whole room. When I closed my eyes and the visual cues were gone, it felt as if I was surrounded by nothingness. In life, we already have many of the things we need to keep us steady and balanced: an innate sense of right and wrong; the knowledge that truth, honesty, and integrity matter; the instinct to love rather than to hate. If we're God-centered, we also know that the Creator is with us always, and that forgiveness and new beginnings are always there for us. *"Thank you, Lord, for keeping us on the right path: balanced, steady, and secure. Please help us to stay that way ... in body, mind, and soul."*

March 27, 2025

...and in the hidden part you will make me to know wisdom.

Psalm 51:6

A dictionary announced that it was choosing 'knowing' as its Word of the Year for 2025. Other organizations and publications also choose 'words of the year'. 'Knowing' is a good choice. That word is like a jewel, a diamond, with so many facets and interpretations, and it provides a useful follow-up to yesterday's Meditation. Most of us have had the experience of knowing something in ways that aren't intellectual or analytical, in ways that have no evidence or proof, and yet ... we just *know* what we think, feel, and believe. We hear spouses or partners say "When we met, we just knew we were meant for each other." We hear new parents say that, when they first held their baby, they had a sense of knowing, of feeling a love they never expected. When we seek our paths through life, we ask God to guide us, to show us, so that we will know what is right for us. Many spiritual leaders believe that the heart is wiser than the mind ... and more reliable. Perhaps 'knowing' can be our word for this year, as we seek light in the darkness, peace in the midst of chaos, and hope in times of fear. *"Knowing God, you who know us better than we know ourselves, give us the inner wisdom to discern our purposes and places in life, to see and follow truth, and to know what matters most—in ourselves, in our lives, and in our world."*

March 28, 2025

The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established. Prov. 19:21

Plans, plans, plans. From class schedules to assignments, team practices to part-time jobs, work projects to housework, church commitments to volunteer service, family obligations to social commitments— our lives seem to continuously be filled with plans. Let's not forget to include God in those plans, not only through prayer and worship, but also by asking God to guide and bless us in our planning. More than that, let us take time to be quiet, to pray, and to listen; to be willing to discern what God's plans for us might be. We may discover that God's plans for us are more wonderful than anything we could plan or dream for ourselves. The popular book 'Jesus Calling', by Sarah Young, is written as if Jesus himself is speaking to the reader, and on most days the message is quite simple: *'Focus on being with me, rest and rejoice in my presence, and let me guide you through this day and every day.'* If we heed that wisdom, not only will "the purpose of the Lord" be established in our lives, but we will find our own peace and fulfillment as well. *"Thy will be done, Father. Thy will."*

March 29, 2025

... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good thing.

2 Timothy 3:17

In the days preceding the Super Bowl, something interesting emerged in all the hype and hoopla. More attention was being paid to one player's personal values and qualities than to his athletic achievements, which were considerable. That player was Saquon Barkley, from our own Lehigh Valley, a 'local boy' known and admired by so many here. I'm a football fanatic and a bleed-green Eagles fan, so I watched as many pre-game shows, analyses, and interviews as I could. Of course, I read every Eagles-related article in our regional newspaper. It was natural that here, where Saquon Barkley has family and friends, so many would share personal recollections of his kindness and caring. But it was surprising that Philadelphia media and national news sources seemed to zero in on this young man's qualities and virtues: his maturity, humility, caring, commitment to his team, and deep appreciation of his family, friends, and fans. Perhaps all players in the spotlight receive similar personal coverage and I just never noticed it before. But it was nice to see a focus on a person's qualities and values ... as well as their records and statistics. Perhaps all people in the spotlight, everywhere, would benefit from such insightful appreciation of who they really are. Perhaps we all would, even if we're not star athletes, even if we're not in a spotlight.

March 30, 2025

My eyes fail with watching for your promise; I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

Psalms 119:82

Can we hear the pain in the psalmist's voice in today's verse? We know how he feels. However strong our faith, however much we pray and believe, there are times in our lives when God and his help and comfort seem far from us. That's a hard thing to understand or accept. But comfort ... even God's own consolation ... isn't something we can just dial up. When we lose someone we love, we can't flip a switch and make the hurt go away. When we're troubled and afraid, relief and answers usually don't come in a few minutes. We are complex human beings. Our minds, hearts, and emotions are intertwined and complicated. It isn't that God wants to prolong our suffering or that he is blind to our pain. But God made us as complex creatures. Sometimes, it takes a long time for us to understand what has happened to us and how life can unfold from where we are. Healing can take a long time. Finding love or recovering from the loss of love can take a long time. Even though we live in a push-button world, we are not push-button creatures. If we have waited a long time or prayed a long time about something, and if we still have no help or no answers, we must still hold onto our faith. God is there, even if the answers are still hidden. *"Lord God, grant your special mercy today to all those who are hurting in any way. Draw near to them. In some way, assure them of your presence and love. If help seems far away, let them know that you are close. Thank you."*

March 31, 2025

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

This verse is a natural sequel to yesterday's Meditation. We know that we can do nothing to earn God's blessings or favor. God's grace alone links us to him and to salvation through Christ. In many ways, that's a relief, because we could never do enough or be good enough to earn God's benevolence. What we *can* do is to ask for God's comfort, love, and presence in our lives, and then be truly open to receiving God's grace and blessings. As we mark the end of one month and the start of another ... the end of one season and the start of another ... we are aware of the passage of time, beyond our control. God is the God of days, months, and years; of endings and beginnings. May God give us 'good hope' for the days and seasons to come.