

# **Germantown Presbyterian Church From Lament to Hope**

## **2021 Lenten Meditations, Morning & Evening Prayers**



GERMANTOWN  
PRESBYTERIAN  
C·H·U·R·C·H

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2021 Lenten Devotion – From Lament to Hope –  
for the church (the people of God)  
by Rev. Susan Carter Wiggins

This Lenten Devotion begins Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021, and takes us together through Easter morning. It was initially conceived and written in the summer of 2020 during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic while preparing an overview of their 2020/2021 Horizons Bible Study, title Into the Light: Finding Hope through Prayers of Lament (P. Lynn Miller) , for Presbyterian Women of the Presbytery of the Mid-South.

Each day you will find a Morning Blessing that includes scripture readings, a devotion, and prayer, and then an Evening Blessing with prayer that will guide you into a restful night.

My hope is that as you reflect on these daily readings you will find opportunities to lament what was and has been, and then look toward the future, always moving towards the light of God with hope in your heart.

Rev. Susan Carter Wiggins  
January 2021



## **ASH WEDNESDAY – FEBRUARY 17, 2021**

### **Morning blessings ...**

Lamentations 1:1-2

“How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!  
How like a widow she has become,  
she that was great among the nations!  
she that was a princess among the provinces  
has become a vassal.  
She weeps bitterly in the night,  
with tears on her cheeks;  
among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her;  
all her friends have dealt treacherously with her,  
they have become her enemies.”

Lament is more than whining; more than complaining. Lament comes from the deepest places of our souls. Lament comes when we feel lost, alone, and forsaken by everyone who loves us, and some even feel forsaken by our God.

The Book of Lamentations is a sequence of five lyric poems that lament the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE (see 2 Kings 25:8-21). Lamentations is so charged with words of sorrow, grief, and anger, as well as senses of being despondent, miserable, fragmented, and hopeless – all from the depth of the poets’ souls to express the emotions of the ancient Israelites that there are but a few verses that express hope. They are there, but we have to look for them like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack in order to hear the people of God’s stubborn and tenacious hold on life that only comes through hope.

From Chapter 1 Lamentations all the way to mid-way through Chapter 3 there are no words or signs of hope ... and then the glimmer appears:

“The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, the Lord’s mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

The Lord is my portion, says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in the Lord.’”

(Lamentations 3:19-24)

In this season of being at home – many of us alone – we, too, can feel these same emotions. The beginning of the Book of Lamentations reminds us of our own cities and communities that have all been closed because of the pandemic. A study on lament can help us better express our own emotions and know that they are normal, and

together we can find glimmers of hope for the days yet to come when we will be reunited with our loved ones. In the meantime, we can be reunited with our God and discover just who it is that God calls us to be.

*Holy God, we come before you with heavy hearts caused by the troubles we see all around us, and the troubles in our own lives, too, for we experience the very same emotions as our ancient ancestors. Our troubles differ, but our emotions are the same. Hear us, O God, as we share from the depths of our souls what troubles us most today ... (share your own troubles with God in this safe space) ...*

*... God of compassion and healing, bless us now with your presence, envelop us with love, and renew us with hope. Amen.*

### **Evening blessings ...**

[Jesus said] “Come to me all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

*God of light and love, abide with all your people tonight, each one made in your holy image;*

*God of light and love, bless us with calmness and rest;*

*God of light and love, grant us dreams of pleasantness;*

*God of light and love, stay with us all through the night*

*and when the morning sun rises in the east,*

*awaken us with joy*

*and bless us into your service throughout the day.*

*In Christ’s name we pray together, saying Amen.*

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Psalm 22:1-19

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

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;  
and by night, but find no rest.3 Yet you are holy,  
enthroned on the praises of Israel.4 In you our ancestors trusted;  
they trusted, and you delivered them.5 To you they cried, and were saved;  
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.6 But I am a worm, and not human;  
scorned by others, and despised by the people.7 All who see me mock at me;  
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;8 'Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—  
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!'9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.10 On you I was cast from my birth,  
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.11 Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.12 Many bulls encircle me,  
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;13 they open wide their mouths at me,  
like a ravening and roaring lion.14 I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint;  
my heart is like wax;it is melted within my breast;  
15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
you lay me in the dust of death.16 For dogs are all around me;  
a company of evildoers encircles me.My hands and feet have shriveled;  
17 I can count all my bones.They stare and gloat over me;  
18 they divide my clothes among themselves,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.19 But you, O Lord, do not be far away!  
O my help, come quickly to my aid!

Psalm 22:1 is a familiar cry to God. It is familiar because it is the very verse that Jesus quotes from the cross, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

The psalmist goes into so much more detail about his sense of abandonment by God beyond verse 1. In verses 1, 11, and 19, the psalmist repeats his feeling of God being "far away" from him. In verses 3-4 we get the sense that he does know of God's presence with humanity, but is missing his own personal connection to God, which is causing him great anguish.

The psalmist goes back and forth - there is an ebb and flow to his knowing, and yet not feeling, God's presence. Verses 9-11 reveal again that he knows that it was God who created him in his mother's womb and brought him into the world, and then by verse 12, we hear his cries of despair again ... and so it goes with this psalm - back and forth - knowing and yet, not feeling the presence of the Almighty.

We can relate. This is us ... or better yet "This IS Us" (as the very popular television series' title by this name helps us to see).

For, we too, have known rationally that God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all of humanity, and yet, there are times in our own lives when we do not feel the presence of God with us in our own time of despair. We've all been there; done that; and probably have the tee-shirt.

Psalms of lament can help us on those days and during those difficult times in our lives, for through the writers' words we can join them in their own feelings, and in our moments of empathy with them, we can see ourselves in words they so eloquently express, and through their writings we can begin to see glimmers of light in our own sense of darkness - hope in the midst of despair.

Psalm 22: 22-26 -

22 I will declare your name to my kindred;  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.23 Praise the Lord, you that fear God; stand in awe of God, O offspring of Israel;  
all you of Jacob's line, give glory.24 For God does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty;  
neither turns away from them; when they cry to the Lord, they are heard.25 My praise is of God in the great assembly;  
I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship the Lord.

26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied,  
and those who seek the Lord shall give praise: “May your  
heart live forever!”

Lament helps us in our own struggles with life just as it  
did ancient ancestors – those who wrote felt despondent  
and far off from God, and yet, also found hope.

*Loving God, you are near to us always – when we lament  
and when we praise – we feel you near. May we live our  
lives in full awareness that life is lived in your presence.  
In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

### **Evening blessings ...**

“We give you our praise and thanks, O God, for all gifts of  
love we have received from you, and for your persistent  
mercy in Jesus Christ.

Especially we thank you for ...  
work we have accomplished pleasing to you,  
the faithful witness of followers of Jesus Christ,  
the example of righteousness we see in parents and  
teachers,  
the innocence and openness we see in children,  
and all works of Christian compassion.

We give you our cares and concerns, O God,  
because we know you are kind and care for your children  
in every circumstance.

Especially we pray for ...  
those who struggle with doubt and despair,  
people afflicted with disease,  
those called to special ministries,  
people neglected or abused,  
congregations, pastors, ruling elders, deacons, and  
chaplains.”

*(Adapted from Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercessions, Daily  
Prayer: The Worship of God Supplemental Liturgical Resource  
5, The Office of Worship for the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]  
and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, [Philadelphia, PA:  
The Westminster Press, 1987, 284).*

*Bless us this evening, O God, with pleasantness,  
and peace;  
awaken us with your love when the sun rises;  
support us with your wisdom,  
and affirm your calling on our lives.  
In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2021

### Morning blessings ...

Romans 12:4-5 – For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individuals we are members one of another.

*We come together to worship and praise God – our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer – the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We learn from the Trinity how to be in relationship with one another – all dancing in different and much needed ways – while all being one in unity through Christ our Lord. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. We are one human race, each one made in the image of Almighty God – all sisters and brothers regardless of where we were born, our ethnicity, creed, skin color, sexual orientation, gender identity – none of it matters in the eyes of God – for we are God’s beloved children whom God calls into service each and every day – all to God’s honor, glory, and praise.*

*May we move through this day knowing that we are called to be God’s beloved community; that we are the very ones called to serve God with energy, intelligence, imagination and love; in thought, word, and deed; with heart, mind, soul, and strength. May we recognize our calling and follow wherever God in Christ Jesus leads us today and every day. Amen.*

### Evening blessings ...

Let us come before the Lord our God;  
let us come before the Lord our God with stillness and humility;  
let us come for the Lord our God  
who draws us near.

*Merciful God, we praise you that you give strength for every weakness,  
forgiveness for our failures, and new beginnings in Jesus Christ.*

*Especially we thank you for ...  
the guidance of your Spirit through this day,  
signs of new life and hope,  
people who have helped us,  
those who struggle for justice,  
expressions of love unexpected or underserved.*

*Almighty God, you know all needs before we speak our prayers,*

*yet you welcome our concerns for others in Jesus Christ.*

*Especially we pray for ...  
those who keep watch over the sick and dying,  
those who weep with the grieving,  
those who are without faith and cannot accept your love,  
those who are born today and those who are near the end of their earthly lives.*

*Bless each one, we pray,  
and bless us, too, with all we need for this day and this night.*

*In Christ’s name we pray, and together say, Amen.*

*(Adapted from Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercessions, Daily Prayer: The Worship of God Supplemental Liturgical Resource 5, The Office of Worship for the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.] and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, [Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1987, 288].*

## **SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2021**

### **Morning blessings ...**

Psalm 137 -

1 By the rivers of Babylon—

there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

2 On the willows there we hung up our harps.

Psalm 137:1-2 - reminds us of how a community of faith comes together to lament – to mourn – to remember a time long ago when all was well with the world. In their minds, they can only praise God in the temple in Jerusalem.

We, too, can feel as though we can only praise God in the sanctuaries of our churches, and as we relate to our ancient ancestors, we can better empathize with them. How they must have felt being so far away and unable to return to their beloved Jerusalem temple.

The psalm then shifts into blame on the Babylonians who forced their exile and captivity in Babylon:

3 For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” 4 How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

Who do we blame for our forced absence from our sanctuaries? We want something or someone to blame – right? It is hard because there are no captors to blame - the blame is an invisible virus. Consider then, how it must have been for our ancestors who endured the global pandemic of 1918. How might they have felt – when they, like us, could only place blame on an invisible virus?

Consider, too, how this psalm of communal lament might have drawn together the communities of Africans who were forced to come to these lands and were, like the ancient Israelites, forced into slave labor – captives against their wills.

Together, they will remember;  
together, we will remember, too:

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

6 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

The psalm then moves from remembering to blame to revenge ... it is important for us to know that the psalmist is human and that the desire for revenge is not God’s doing, but is his human response to suffering.

7 Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall, how they said, “Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!”

8 O daughter Babylon, you devastator!

Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us!

9 Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

When we feel as the psalmist felt – because we, too, are human and can have the same emotions of anger and revenge against our perceived enemies – it is our communities of faith that can help to draw us near to God again. When we feel these emotions, it is time to reach out to those whom we trust to hear our laments, to lament with us, and to come back around to a sense of hope.

Together, they will come back around to seeing God’s hope for their future; together, we will come back around to seeing God’s hope for our future, too.

*Holy God, we are grateful that you gave your children the gift of each other. May we be knit together, bear one another’s burdens, and express our shared sorrow in shared lament, remembering that we are not alone. Amen.*

### **Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God this evening with humility and stillness ...

*Holy God our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we come before you in humble prayer and ask that you hear us this night; we come before you with prayers for ourselves and others:*

*protect your people, O God and keep us safe  
until the coming of your new dawn  
and the establishment of your righteous rule.*

*By your Holy Spirit*

*stir up within us a longing  
for the light of your new day,  
and guide us by the bright presence of Jesus Christ,  
your Son, our risen Lord. Amen.*

*(Adapted from Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercessions, Daily Prayer: The Worship of God Supplemental Liturgical Resource 5, The Office of Worship for the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.] and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, [Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1987, 180].*

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

What are the words that we say when a loved one dies?  
What are the words that we say?

“I am here;”  
I see you;”  
I hear you;”  
I am beside you;”  
I love you.”

What are the words that we say when a woman or man of strength and courage dies? What are the words that we say?

“There will never be another person like her/him;”  
“I learned so much from her/him;”  
“She/He was my mentor and my friend;”  
“I never met her/him, but I always looked to her/him to know how to be strong in the face of adversity.”

What are the words that we say as we look to a world without this person here on earth any longer? What are the words that we say?

“I will pick up her/his mantle and carry on in the struggle for justice;”  
“I will honor her/his memory by standing beside the oppressed, lifting up the down-trodden, bringing good news to the poor and release to the captives;”  
“I will not let her/him down;”  
“I will plant my feet solidly on her/his shoulders and carry on;”  
“I will inspire the generations yet to come to ‘go and do likewise’ when I am gone;”  
“I will not forget you, my friend.”

What are the words that we say?  
Let us then lean into them and live them out.  
Let our words be more than words – let our words become our actions.

*Holy God, bless us this day with memories of those whom we’ve loved and lost, those who’ve inspired us and made a difference in our lives, and as the memories come flooding back, let us then remember their legacies, their dreams, their hopes for a future world filled with your love shown by your people to your people in every corner of the world, and then help us to live them out, beginning today. In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God with stillness and humility;

let us come ...

*Holy God, pour out your Spirit upon us, your children, that dreams and visions bring us ever closer to Christ’s kingdom.*

*As we rest tonight  
may we know your presence with us,  
and as we rise tomorrow  
may we know your calling on our lives,  
and with haste,  
may we follow wherever you lead, Lord Jesus. Amen.*



**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament expresses grief and sorrow;  
lament helps us move towards hope.

The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!

My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,  
the Lord's mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

"The Lord is my portion, says my soul,  
'therefore I will hope in the Lord.'"

(Lamentations 3:19-24)

To suppress grief and sorrow causes harm to our bodies, minds, and souls; causes harm to us physically, emotionally, and spiritually; causes us to turn away from caring for ourselves; causes us to turn away from God. Lament is our expression of grief and sorrow and longing that brings relief and helps move us towards hope.

Paul writes to the church at Rome: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5:1-5)

Oftentimes we would rather not face our sufferings, our grief, our anguish, and it is difficult to think of suffering producing endurance, endurance producing character, and character producing hope – because the pathway is hard for us to walk, and we think that if we can just suppress our sufferings just one more day, we will not have to walk through the pain. Walking through the suffering, the grief, the sorrow is the only way we can find our way towards hope – hope for the future – hope towards the promise given to us by God in Christ Jesus – hope towards joy.

Today you may be suffering – me, too.

Today you may grieve – me, too.

Today you may lament – me, too.

The legacies of those I've loved and lost – those saints who've gone before me - will live on in me and through me as these are the women and men who both challenge and encourage me to pick up their mantles and carry on with their legacies of justice-seeking, kindness-loving, and humility-walking each day with my God.

And, therein lays my suffering, my endurance, my character, and my hope.

*God of hope, enter into our midst and fill us with your wisdom. Open our hearts, minds, and souls to bravely face our grief and sorrow by lamenting what we are feeling, so that we can begin to move towards and see clearly the hope you bring in blessing upon blessing. Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God with humility and quietness;

let us come ...

The night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you. (Psalm 139:12)

In our darkness, God provides light; in our grief, God provides comfort and expressions of grief through lament; in our lament, God provides hope. We are often the very ones who delay experiencing God's hope because we delay walking through the darkness because we forget God's presence beside and all around us in the valley of the shadow of death.

*Holy God, forgive us for forgetting your holy presence; forgive us for forgetting your loving comfort. Draw us near to you tonight and hold us close so that we can know your love, Christ's peace, and the Holy Spirit's strong comfort and fellowship, and then know your hope that awaits us on the other side of our darkness. In Christ's name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope – what does that mean, exactly?

Lament is the expression  
of grief and sorrow,  
of isolation and loneliness,  
of fear and anger – is it?

Is lament the expression of fear and anger from long-held  
and long-silenced voices now crying out for justice and  
equity from the city centers?

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai  
tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and  
went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry.  
(Esther 4:1)

Is lament this expression, too? Yes.

Lament is the expression of both emotions and life cir-  
cumstances that cause us - humankind - to feel, live, and  
be ... always in a state of hemorrhaging.

Where, O where is hope ... then?

Reach out, my sister, my brother; reach out –  
take the hem of his robe in your hand as you lament.  
Weep and cry out – be silent no more.  
Let the world hear your cries;  
Let your anguish be known to God.

Reach out – take the hem of his robe in your hand and  
feel the power of God’s love, Christ’s peace, and the Holy  
Spirit’s strong comfort and fellowship come rushing to you-  
come rushing over you and into you like mighty waters.

Reach out – take the hem of his robe in your hand and  
begin to feel ... joy.

Lament to hope ... it is a journey we all walk ... but never  
alone.

Luke 8:40-48 - Now when Jesus returned, the crowd  
welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. 41 Just  
then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the  
synagogue. He fell at Jesus’ feet and begged him to come  
to his house, 42 for he had an only daughter, about twelve  
years old, who was dying.

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. 43 Now there  
was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages  
for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had  
on physicians, no one could cure her. 44 She came up  
behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and

immediately her hemorrhage stopped. 45 Then Jesus  
asked, “Who touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said,  
“Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.”

46 But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; for I noticed  
that power had gone out from me.” 47 When the woman  
saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trem-  
bling; and falling down before him, she declared in the  
presence of all the people why she had touched him, and  
how she had been immediately healed. 48 He said to her,  
“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

*Holy God, no matter the laments we express, you are with  
us; you hold us gently as we weep; you give us courage  
and words as we cry out in the city streets; you sustain us  
for the hard times, see us through our journeys of lament,  
and bring us out on to the awaiting green pastures where  
you cause our shadows to fall in pleasant places – where  
hope and joy await our presence.*

*And, we thank you.*

*Reveal to us today how we might walk with others on their  
journeys of lament; how we might point the way towards  
the hem of Christ’s robe – towards his pathway that leads  
to hope, joy, and love. Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God this evening with  
peace; let us come with humility; let us come with the  
concerns of our hearts; let us come.

*Eternal God of love and light, as you have given life to  
us, so may we live according to your holy will revealed in  
Jesus Christ.*

*Bless us with good rest tonight and awaken us into your  
service with the morning light so we may be the very ones  
who share your life, your generosity, your hospitality, and  
your love with all the world. Amen.*

## **THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2021**

### **Morning blessings ...**

Romans 8:14-17 -

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Paul writes about the tension between suffering and hope in the glory yet to come – our eternal lives with Christ our Lord. From the beginning of creation until the end time when Christ returns the world has been, is, and will be filled with suffering and brokenness. So much of the suffering we personally experience is grief when loved ones die. Death creates void in our lives – deep holes in our hearts that we struggle to know how to refill. God, through the psalmists, the prophets, Jesus (through the gospel writers' accounts), the apostle Paul, and more remind us: "do not fear," "do not be afraid," "do not fall back into fear," and so on. These similar phrases occur about 365 times throughout scripture, which means that God wants us to know that we have nothing to fear for God remains steadfastly beside us come what may in our lives – including suffering.

The reminder, too, is that even though we suffer, restoration will come because through our suffering God's hope will spring forth as God creates something new in and through the deep holes in our hearts.

*Holy God, as the sun rises in the morning sky, and we begin our day, we ask that you remind us of your steadfast and ever-faithful presence in our lives, calming us, and giving us nothing to fear. Help us to know that from our brokenness you will create beauty, and from our pain you will bring forth new hope, new joy, and new life, that we will then be blessed to share with everyone we meet, for this is your calling to each of us. In Christ's name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

### **Evening blessings ...**

Breathe deeply and be still for this moment in time; breathe deeply and come before the Lord our God; breathe deeply and come.

In the city of God, night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:5)

*"O God, you have brought us through this day to a time of reflection and rest.*

*Calm our souls within us, and give us a sense of your peace that will refresh us. Keep us close to Christ that we may be closer to one another because of Christ's wondrous love."*

*In his name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

*(The Office of Worship for the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.] and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, "Prayers for Ordinary Days," Daily Prayer: The Worship of God Supplemental Liturgical Resource 5, [Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1987, 68].*

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Jeremiah 9:17-21 –

17 Thus says the Lord of hosts:

Consider, and call for the mourning-women to come;  
send for the skilled women to come;

18 let them quickly raise a dirge over us,  
so that our eyes may run down with tears,  
and our eyelids flow with water.

19 For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion:

“How we are ruined!  
We are utterly shamed,  
because we have left the land,  
because they have cast down our dwellings.”

20 Hear, O women, the word of the Lord,  
and let your ears receive the word of his mouth;  
teach to your daughters a dirge,  
and each to her neighbor a lament.

21 “Death has come up into our windows,  
it has entered our palaces,  
to cut off the children from the streets  
and the young men from the squares.”

Women who understand their role in the community and community of faith have been equipped (skilled) in the art of lament and mourning, and who are readily available for deployment when the need arises are called upon by God to come forth and share their gifts and talents with the nation of Judah. Throughout scripture women, in particular, lament – mourn, cry out to God and community – to hear and witness deep grief on behalf of bereaved individuals, families, and/or community.

Women throughout scripture lament their own barrenness: Hannah, Sarah, Rachel, and Elizabeth all lament their own barrenness (1 Samuel 2:1-10; Genesis 18:9-15; Genesis 30:1-2; 22-23; Luke 1:8-25).

The Syro-Phoenician woman laments on behalf of her starving child (Mark 7:24-29).

Hagar and the widow at Zarephath both lament that they will soon die of starvation with their only children (Genesis 21:16; 1 Kings 17:7-16).

In Jeremiah 9:17-21, God brings these skilled mourning women out into the light and into the very forefront of national leadership. The people are then instructed by God to lament and for the women to lead them.

Through lament our emotions of grief and sorrow, of isolation and loneliness, of fear and anger pour out from our pores with loud cries and wails. And, most importantly, through lament we can begin to find our way on a new journey towards hope and new life.

Lamenting women can lead and guide us to trust in God – because God hears our cries, our laments, and our prayers. In Genesis 18:14, God makes this astounding statement, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Then, in miraculous

display – one after the other – God backs up God’s declaration, enabling many previously barren women to experience pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. The fulfillment of God’s promise to them reminds us, too, that God hears our laments, including humanity’s cries for a Savior. God is indeed attentive to our daily needs.

Lamenting women can help us to express our deep emotions and enable us to continue trusting in God even as we lament; and they can lead us towards feeling and experiencing new hope and new life – a new hope and new life that we cannot fathom awaits us when we are in the depth of pain and sorrow.

Who are our lamenting women? Who are those women we can call upon who are skilled in lament, and can lead and guide us through our times of sorrow and grief? In our own family of faith we have many – can you think of who they are?

These lamenting women are God-sent to us, just as those called out by God in Jeremiah are to their community of faith. Lamenting women can lead us through to the new light that God will bless us with ... and it is possible that even dancing will come, too, as Miriam reveals in Exodus 15:20 –

“Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing.”

Let us pray together ...

*Holy God of Sarah and Miriam, God of Hagar and Tamar, God of our sisters, daughters, nieces, and cousins, we are ready to lead your people in mourning whenever the time comes, and we hear you calling out to us to go. We promise, too, to lead your people through their journeys of lament to hope, and to lead them into dancing when the time is right. Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God this evening ...

*O God,  
you have designed this wonderful world,  
and know all things good for us.  
Give us such faith  
that, by day and by night,  
at all times and in all places,  
we may without fear  
entrust those who are dear to us  
to your never-failing love,  
in this life  
and in the life to come.  
Bless us with peaceful sleep to refresh our tired bodies,  
and awaken us again tomorrow into your service.  
In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Jeremiah 8:22 – the prophet laments the peoples’ deaf ears to the Lord:

18 My joy is gone, grief is upon me,  
my heart is sick.

19 Hark, the cry of my poor people  
from far and wide in the land:

‘Is the Lord not in Zion?

Is her King not in her?’

(‘Why have they provoked me to anger with their images,  
with their foreign idols?’)

20 ‘The harvest is past, the summer is ended,  
and we are not saved.’

21 For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,  
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

22 Is there no balm in Gilead?

Is there no physician there?

Why then has the health of my poor people  
not been restored?

We long for healing and restoration.

If we are living in the Lord our God, we finally recognize that no earthly remedy can compare with the healing that comes from a sense of God’s presence; nothing else can heal “the sin-sick soul.”

The African American spiritual “There is a Balm in Gilead” helps us along our journey from lament to hope; it helps us to know that God in Christ Jesus is ever-present, ever-faithful, ever-beside, ever-praying on our behalf, ever-healing our sin-sick souls:

There Is a Balm in Gilead

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;  
there is a balm in Gilead to save the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work’s in vain,  
but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;  
there is a balm in Gilead to save the sin-sick soul.

Don’t ever feel discouraged, for Jesus is your friend,  
and if you lack for knowledge, he’ll not refuse to lend.

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;  
there is a balm in Gilead to save the sin-sick soul.

If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul,  
you can tell the love of Jesus and say, “He died for us all.”

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;  
there is a balm in Gilead to save a sin-sick soul.

*(There Is a Balm in Gilead, TEXT: African American Spiritual; TUNE: BALM IN GILEAD, published in Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), #792).*

*Holy God, you’ve called us to be members of your one family through one body, one faith, one baptism, so that when one suffers, we all suffer together; when one is joyful, we all rejoice together. We pray for your comfort and healing power to bring hope to those in distress; we pray to be your vessels of healing balm for everyone we might encounter today and every day. In Christ’s name we together with one voice, saying, Amen.*

[https://youtu.be/8fcMxl\\_6xsk](https://youtu.be/8fcMxl_6xsk)

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us settle into our evening by coming before the Lord our God with humility; let us come ...

*God of love, we thank you for this day and ask your blessings on this night. May we know your holy presence, Christ’s peace, and the Holy Spirit’s strong comfort and fellowship as we prepare ourselves for rest.*

*Bless those in greatest need of your safety and protection tonight – especially children, women, and the elderly – surround them with your protective shield, we pray. Bless those who are being born tonight, and those who will die tonight, and their loved ones, too. Bless those who are ill with your healing mercies. And, bless us with renewed commitment to follow you, Lord Jesus, wherever you may lead with our all that we have and all that we are – with heart, soul, mind, and strength. May it be so, we pray in Christ’s name together, saying, Amen.*

**MONDAY, MARCH 1, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament ——— comfort ——— hope

Psalm 121 -

I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.

The Lord will not let your foot be moved;  
the Lord who keeps you will not slumber.  
The Lord who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
the Lord will keep your life.  
The Lord will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and for evermore.

Fifty-seven years ago this morning I felt my mother's lament envelop me and transfer from her body into my own in a very tangible, palpable way as she wrapped her arms around me and held me close. Her lament was at the same time her comfort.

This memory serves me well in times of sadness and grief, for God does this for us, too. God laments with us, is beside us and holds us gently. God's lament is simultaneous with God's comfort.

Jesus wept. (John 11:35)

Jesus lamented his own grief while he comforted Mary and Martha at the death of his dear friend and their brother – his brother, too.

Comfort sits in between lament and hope;  
comfort reminds us that we aren't alone – that the comforters care deeply and hold us gently;  
comfort provides glimpses of light in our darkness,  
and reveal to us ... eventual ... hope.

*Holy God, when we feel alone, remind us, we pray, of your constant presence through the very touch of those who gather around us to hold us gently as their lament becomes our lament, and their comfort becomes our sense of your loving presence. May we be reminded too, of the hope of your promise to us, and in your hope find our own. In Christ's name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

*The day has been full, Holy God, and now we come before you in the stillness of the evening to offer our prayers of gratitude to you for the blessings of our lives, particularly the blessings of today. We thank you, O God, and with humility, we ask that you hear our prayers for those who are hurting, afraid, lonely, grieving, and/or ill. Bless each one with your mercies of healing, and draw us all near to you so that we may hear your calling on our lives, and respond in sharing your love with all the world. In Christ's name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

The love of God in Christ Jesus – in the midst of lament -

Romans 8:24-39 -

24 For in our hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27 And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sisters and brothers – in the midst of our sorrow and grief – in the midst of our living and our dying – in the midst of missing loved ones – in the midst of our sin – in the midst – in the midst – in the midst – is God in Christ Jesus, for nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing.

*Let us go forth to live our lives this day to God's honor, glory, and praise. Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God with thanksgiving, humility, and obedience;

let us come ...

*O Holy God, still our minds, calm our souls, rest our bodies this night;*

*draw us nigh to your heartbeat and to your voice calling our names to come and follow you, and to live our lives according to your will.*

*By the power of your Holy Spirit, stir us as we sleep with whisperings of where we should begin to be your vessels when we awaken;*

*and grant us courage and faithfulness to go and do and be your people – without hesitation and with the confidence you embed within our very souls.*

*In Christ's name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope ... to Light – the church (the people of God)

In the wee hours just after midnight  
and before the sun rose  
on the Lord's day,  
she completed her baptism.  
For this woman of God, clergy woman, pastor,  
mother, daughter, grandmother, aunt, niece, cousin,  
friend –  
dying from her earthly life  
and living into her eternal life in that moment on a Sun-  
day morning was as it should be – *kairos*.

*(KAIROS IS AN ANCIENT GREEK WORD MEANING THE RIGHT, CRITICAL, OR OPPORTUNE MOMENT.)*

Her light, laughter, love, faith, hope, and joy –  
will live on in all who were blessed to know and love her.

*Holy God, may I carry forth her light within me and bless others just as she blessed me. Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God ...

*O God,  
you have designed this wonderful world,  
and know all things good for us.  
Give us such faith  
that, by day and by night,  
at all times and in all places,  
we may without fear  
entrust those who are dear to us  
to your never-failing love,  
in this life  
and in this life to come;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*



**THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

The inceptions of lament are as varied as there are human conditions – we immediately think – death – but all types of loss and change in life circumstances are jarring to the human soul and can be the very impetus that leads us into lament. We cry out to God – we plea for God’s help – and, if we are healthy human beings who believe in God to be beside us, come what may – we trust, trust, trust in God to provide for us especially in our times of strife that caused our lament.

In the midst of my own lament – presently caused by a recent death of a loved one – I turn to the psalmists for solace and remember that God is always with me and will see me through this time of grief and lamenting.

**Psalm 121**

I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.  
The Lord will not let your foot be moved;  
the Lord who keeps you will not slumber.  
The Lord who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
the Lord will keep your life.  
The Lord will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and for evermore.

**Psalm 23**

O God, you are my shepherd, I want nothing more.  
You let me lie down in green meadows;  
you lead me beside restful waters;  
you refresh my soul.  
You guide me to lush pastures  
for the sake of your Name.

Even if I’m surrounded by shadows of Death,  
I fear no danger, for you are with me.  
Your rod and your staff – they give me courage.  
You spread a table for me in the presence of my enemies,  
and you anoint my head with oil – my cup overflows!  
Only goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life  
and I will dwell in your house, O God,  
for days without end.

*Holy God, when we are in the midst of lament, no matter what brought us here, remind us of your holy presence to see us through to the other side where green and lush pastures await us. Along our journeys of lament, lead us beside waters still so we may be refreshed in your love and comfort, and begin to find our way through to your hope and your joy, for our whole lives long. Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God with humility and stillness;

let us come ...

*Gracious Lord, we give you thanks for the day,  
especially for the good  
we were permitted to give and to receive;  
the day is now past,  
and we commit it to you.  
We entrust to you the night;  
we rest in surety,  
for you are our help,  
and you neither slumber nor sleep. Amen.*

*(The Office of Worship for the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.] and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, “Night Prayers,” Daily Prayer: The Worship of God Supplemental Liturgical Resource 5, [Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1987, 202].*

**FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Confession as lament to forgiveness to hope –

Thanks, Please, Forgive, Help, Wow ... Author Anne Lamont writes “I do not know much about God and prayer, but I have come to believe, over the past twenty-five years, that there’s something to be said about keeping prayer simple. Help. Thanks. Wow” (*Anne Lamont, Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers, [New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2012], 1*).

I think about this model for prayer a lot and find great use for it – especially in teaching about prayer. As I’ve been writing about lament these past two weeks, I continue to go deeper into what it means to lament – what all it encompasses, and believe seeking God’s forgiveness is another aspect of lament – and can be an extension of Lamont’s three essential prayers (although I rearrange the order): Thanks, Wow, Please, Forgive, Help.

**Confession as Lament ...**

We cry out to God when things in our lives go awry. Do we also cry out to God when we ourselves go awry from God in sin? Do we cry out seeking God’s forgiveness? Or, just when things aren’t going as we wish they would?

Ezra 10:1 – While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him out of Israel; the people also wept bitterly.

Psalm 32:5 – Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Daniel 9:5 – We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled.

Romans 3:23-24 – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

We are called by God to come before God with humility confessing our sins. When we do, we trust in God’s forgiveness and are then enabled to experience God’s hope and joy.

**Psalm 130 –**

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.

It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.

*Holy God, we come before you this morning of this new day with thanksgiving for being awakened by you for service to you today. With humility we cry out to you confessing our sins for all that we’ve done and all that we’ve left undone, and we seek your forgiveness. Forgive us, we pray when we go awry from you; when we hold you at arm’s length wanting to live our lives as we choose and not according to your will – forgetting that you are our Creator God and that you formed us in our mothers’ wombs and birthed us for your good purpose to live in the world as your children “fighting the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12). Forgive us when we forget and draw us near to you again so that we can feel your heartbeat and hear your whispers in our ears revealing how you call us to go forth into the world today being your vessels of love for everyone we meet. May it be so, we pray together saying, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us breathe deeply, inhaling the love of God, exhaling all anxiety this day has brought to us;

let us breathe deeply again, inhaling Christ’s peace, exhaling doubts and concerns;

let us breathe deeply once more, feeling the Holy Spirit’s presence within and all around as we still ourselves and come before the triune God in prayer ...

*Lord, our God, you show us your ways of compassion and love, and you forgive us, sinners of your redeeming. Be beside us now as we seek you in these quiet moments at the end of this day. Forgive us for the ways we’ve not been the people you call us to be today – sometimes speaking harshly or judgmentally towards others, serving ourselves instead of our neighbors in need, not being hospitable or generous or kind. Forgive us, we pray. Bless us with a good night’s rest and sweet dreams. Awaken us with the morning light fully into your presence, and lead us on, Lord Jesus, to wherever you want us to serve you tomorrow. May we do so with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love that comes from you; may we do so with all our hearts, minds, and souls, in thought, word, and deed. As we do so, may we honor and glorify your holy name and bring you joy. We pray this prayer together in Christ’s name, saying, Amen.*

**SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Fight the good fight of the faith” (the Apostle Paul writing to his disciple Timothy. (1 Timothy 6:12)

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul goes on to say, “Christ Jesus in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession ... and I charge you [Timothy and all who will read this letter] to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 6:13-14).

“The commandment” - all Paul is charging Timothy with in this letter. Paul writes, too, “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11). The commandment to live his life according to these attributes as he fights the good fight of the faith.

I’m reminded, too, of Jesus’ commandments to all who desire - and claim - to follow him -

- love one another as he loves us (John 13:34-35);
- love neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22:34-40);
- love the Lord our God with heart, mind, soul, and strength (Matthew 22:34-40);
- pray for those who dislike you and speak against you (Matthew 5:44-45; Romans 5:8, 11);
- repent - seek God’s forgiveness for all we’ve done and all we’ve left undone (Matthew 4:17);
- believe in Jesus as God incarnate (John 14:11);
- follow - share the gospel - go - share the gospel (Matthew 16:24-25; 28:18-20);
- pray - always - and without ceasing (Luke 21:36; Matthew 6:7-8; Luke 10:2; Luke 22:40, 46; Matthew 6:6; Luke 11:3-4; Luke 6:28; Luke 11:1);
- forgive those who’ve wronged us (Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 18:21-22);
- feed his sheep, tend his lambs, feed his lambs (John 21:15-17);
- become like little children (Matthew 18:3);
- preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15; Matthew 10:7);
- teach them to observe all things whatsoever I’ve commanded (Matthew 28:20).

In other words, we are called to follow the model of Jesus’ life, and therein we find how we are called to live our own lives.

And further reminded of God’s commandment through the prophets to -

- love kindness, seek justice, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8, Hosea 12:6).

“Get in some good trouble.” (Congressman John Lewis speaking to the people.)

Jesus himself got in all kinds of “good trouble” as he sought to right the world back to God -

- Jesus condemned the market place at the temple (Matthew 21:12-13);
- Jesus accused temple authorities of devouring widows’ households (Mark 12:40-44);

- Jesus healed and fed his disciples on Sabbath days (Mark 2:23-28; Mark 3:1-6);

- Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:13-17);

According to John’s gospel, he replied to Pontius Pilate’s question “Are you a king?” by saying, “You say that I am a king. The reason I was born and came into this world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to my voice” (John 18:33-38).

We know that Christ Jesus is the fulfilment of the law (Matthew 5:17-20), and that the truth to which Jesus testified is God’s steadfast and faithful love for all that God has created - human beings, creation, land, air, and sea animals - all that God has created is for God’s good purpose. God, through Christ Jesus is continually reconciling the world (all God has created) back to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), for God has shown us mortals what good is, and now what the Lord our God requires of us is to love kindness, seek justice, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8) in order to be reconciled back to God, for we all have gone astray of the ways of God by pursuing the ways of the world (Romans 3:9-26).

People of God - followers of Christ Jesus - in the midst of our lament for the ways we’ve previously lived our lives, hope emerges when we begin to follow Christ’s commandments and to live our lives as he lived his, always trusting in God to go before us, guard behind us, be our foundation, and the light upon our pathway.

Therefore, sisters and brothers, what kind of “good trouble” might we be called to get into - even today? How might we, like Timothy, be called to “fight the good fight of the faith?” What aspects of Jesus’ life might we include in our own lives today?

These are really good question for our pondering today, and I invite you to join me in doing so.

Let us pray ...

*Lord God in Christ Jesus, you call us to come and follow you; you provide the one model of fighting the good fight of the faith that we should not only follow, but also model for others so that your message of love for all people might be expounded across the world. Truly, Lord God in Christ Jesus, you call us to get in some sort of good trouble, today. Reveal to us what that might be; empower us with your words and actions, not our own, so that we are your vessels of love; embolden us with your courage and strength to be the people you call us to be - beginning today. In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

*Holy God, of our present trouble and promised triumph, open our eyes to see you in the midst of our struggles. Open our ears to hear your voice calling to us to come and follow you, Lord Jesus. Open our hearts to feel your presence with us, Holy Spirit of God. Abide with us tonight, holy triune God, blessing us with good rest, and awaken us into your service with the rising of the morning sun. Amen.*

**MONDAY, MARCH 8, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – when death comes –

What happens when death comes to someone we dearly love? How do we find our way ... how do we place one foot in front of the other?

Who are we – the people of God – the church – the followers of Jesus Christ – called to be ... and what, for goodness sakes, are we called to do?

John 11:28-37

28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ 37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

The lesson gives us the picture of Jesus, Mary, Martha, and some Jews - who have come to console them - mourning over Lazarus' death.

Mourning looks different with each one:

- Mary weeps and also cries out to Jesus;
- The Jews weep and are puzzled as to why Jesus didn't save his friend;
- Martha weeps and cries out in an earlier verse;
- Jesus weeps.

Before this passage, Jesus has been told that his friend Lazarus is sick. Jesus knows that Lazarus has died, but knows, too, that through his death God will be glorified, and so he makes the decision not to go to him immediately. (John 11:1-6)

Jesus' actions are not what we want in our time of grief turned to panic - we, like Martha and Mary, want Jesus to come – and to come now.

When Jesus does go – two days later – Lazarus has been dead for four days. (John 11:17-22) Martha rushes out to meet Jesus and lashes out at Jesus exclaiming “If you'd been here, my brother would not have died!”

And, in the midst of her outburst towards Jesus, he gives Martha good – yet unbelievable – news – her brother will rise again!

Jesus then does something that seems unlikely in that moment – he asks Martha to profess her faith to him! And she does! (John 11:25-27)

Are we, in the midst of our sorrow and even outbursts of despair, able to confess our faith before God? We know that Jesus is teaching Martha (and us) in this moment ... but what lesson might even Martha be teaching us in this moment ... about life, death, faith, and hope in the resurrection?

Paul writes from his prison cell – as he is facing death – not only hope in the resurrection – but how the gospel can be proclaimed even while we are experiencing sorrow, suffering, grief, and loss:

Philippians 1:1-14 –

[From] Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I thank my God every time I remember you, 4 constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, 5 because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. 9 And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight 10 to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, 11 having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

12 I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; 14 and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

Paul teaches that even in the midst of his suffering the gospel message can still be proclaimed.

This is what Jesus is teaching to Martha and Mary, and all the other disciples, too ... God's glory can be proclaimed even when we are in the midst of sorrow, grief, and the loss of a loved one.

If you are in the midst of sorrow from the death of a loved one, try writing your laments in a journal – cry out to God, tell God how you feel, seek God's relief, express your trust in God, and give thanks to God for the life of your loved one, and God's promise of eternal life for us all.

Other scripture passages to help us see hope in the midst of experiencing death ...

1 Corinthians 15:54b-55 –

When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The hope is in the resurrection and God's promise of eternal life. Death no longer has the last word. This is a central message of our faith, celebrated joyfully every single Sunday – for each Sunday is resurrection Sunday!

Romans 6:4 –

Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so too we might walk in newness of life.

Isaiah 41:10 –

Do not fear, for I am with you,

do not be afraid, for I am your God;

I will strengthen you, I will help you,

I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

And, my favorite ...

Romans 8:35, 37-39 ...

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present,

nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Praise be to God for the hope we can see even in the midst of our sorrow and grief. Amen.*

### Evening blessings ...

*God of life,*

*you have done for us what we could not do for ourselves.*

*You have brought freedom to us when we were captive to death.*

*May we choose to live, forgiven and freed by you through Jesus Christ.*

*In his name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – prophetic imagination –

Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. (Luke 6:21)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

Jesus knew that beyond weeping and mourning, comfort and laughter follow. He knew, too, that weeping and mourning are the very pathways that lead to comfort and laughter once again. Weeping precedes mourning; mourning precedes comfort; comfort precedes laughter; the experience of laughter begets new life.

It is difficult – if not impossible – to know the pathway to walk that will lead us into new life when we are in the midst of despair, sorrow, grief, anguish, pain, or betrayal that have landed us in deep holes in our souls. Comfort personified as a dear friend or pastor or family member who is gifted and blessed with empathic listening skills is the very one who will bring to us their quiet and gently sit beside us as long as we need.

Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. From a distance they saw Job, but did not recognize him. There they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. When they came to Job, they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was great. (Job 2:11-13)

Job's friends provided comfort and empathy ... until they didn't. When they first arrived they were the soothing balm that Job needed.

“There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole ... .” This familiar hymn draws from the people of Judah's cry out to the Lord in Jeremiah, “My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick ... is there no balm in Gilead?” (Jeremiah 8:18, 22) The hymn continues ... “there is a balm in Gilead to make the sin-sick whole ... .”

The balm is the salvation of the Lord God – therein lies the renewal of life for the ancient people of God in the land of Judah, but they aren't willing to see (or walk on) the pathway upon which God calls them to walk. Jeremiah's prophetic preaching is based on the covenant relationship

between God and the people of Israel and Judah. Jeremiah is beside them, counseling and providing vision for their futures, if only they have ears to hear and eyes to see.

Prophets in our day are those who come and sit quietly, listening with empathy to all that is on our hearts. When we are ready, they will gently coax us, one step at a time, to begin to walk along a pathway that will lead to newness of life. Prophets of ancient time and modern time are blessed with prophetic imagination – a unique lens through which they can see what is to come, depending on the pathway we choose to walk. If we choose to walk with them, their prophetic imagination can penetrate our despair so that glimpses of light begin to flicker in, hearts are touched and softened, breaths are deepened, hope is envisioned, smiles are renewed, futures are believed and embraced, and we, the former despairing ones – as individuals and communities – are restored, rejuvenated, and truly ready to begin anew.

Blessed are you who weep, for you shall laugh [again].

*Holy God, we thank you for this new day which is rising into your fullness; we thank you for awakening us into this day for service to you. Bless us, we pray with your prophetic imagination, so that we may be the very ones to sit quietly beside those who are weeping today, and one day, when they are ready, help them find their own pathways back to you, to renewed life and laughter. In Christ's name, we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God ...

*Be our light in the darkness, O Lord, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night, we pray. With the morning light, guide our waking that we may walk with Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## **WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021**

### **Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – “zerrissenheit (torn-to-pieces-hood)” –

Women, especially, tend to live in the feverish pursuit of happiness and well-being for everyone in their sphere of being. Author Anne Morrow Lindbergh writes “Woman’s life today is tending more and more toward the state William James describes so well in the German word, ‘zerrissenheit – torn-to-pieces-hood,’ and eventually she will be shattered into a thousand pieces.” (*Lindbergh, Gift from the Sea, [New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1955, 2005 {50th Anniversary Edition}], 49*).

Lindbergh continues “What women must create for themselves, then, is quiet time alone, contemplation, prayer, music, a centering line of thought or reading, of study or work” (p. 49).

I think of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who created for herself such a quiet time to be beside her Lord, Jesus. Mary knew her way around the kitchen as much as her sister Martha did, but Mary knew, too, her need to sit quietly at the feet of her Lord to listen and learn from him.

Luke 10:38-42 - Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

Martha’s outburst towards Jesus is really her projected anger towards her sister. She demands that Jesus “make” Mary come and help her. Perhaps Martha is also angry with herself because she has reached feelings of “zerrissenheit – torn-to-pieces-hood;” perhaps she is worn thin with preparing meals, cooking, cleaning, and caring for everyone in her household, and in that moment, her anger gets projected on the one she most loves, Jesus.

This is Martha’s lament – her crying out to the Lord – her demand that Jesus “fix” the problem. Jesus responds pastorally to the distraught “torn-to-pieces-Martha” suggesting that she breathe (my words), breathe deeply and just see how her sister is sitting quietly, taking a moment for self-care with her Lord, listening, and learning ... and perhaps see that she, too, needs to step away from the kitchen and take time with Jesus.

Jesus, in this moment, is helping Martha move from lament to hope through his compassionate, pastoral care. When we are living in a state of “zerrissenheit” – we can’t see the frenzy we’ve created or how it is affecting our own sense of well-being.

Mary teaches us that spending quiet time with our Lord and Savior is essential to our own inner peace as well as our own growth in our Christian life. Without it, we become “torn-to-pieces” and live in this unfortunate state until someone helps us to find the pathway out towards wholeness.

Who will be your teacher today?

To whom can you reach out and say, “I’m in a torn-to-pieces-state and could use your help – do you have a few minutes to just listen?”

To whom can you offer help today?

To whom can you reach out to check on them today, asking, “How are you doing?”

We are each other’s sisters and brothers – siblings in Christ. Jesus has shown us how to pastorally help one another beyond lament to hope through listening and offering quiet time – and prayer with each other. Without us, Jesus has no hands or feet in the world. We are his people and the ones he depends on in the here and now.

*Holy God, as we begin this new day, help us to know who needs our listening hearts, and if we are the ones in need, help us to reach out to someone we know will listen and be beside us so that we, like Mary, can see, as Jesus calls in, “the better way.” Amen.*

### **Evening blessings ...**

Let us be still;  
let us be still in this moment;  
let us be still in this moment and come before the Lord our God ...

*Holy God, as the night draws nigh  
may the darkness envelop us as a soft and warm blanket;  
may we give you thanks and praise  
for your gracious blessings of this day;  
and may we be blessed, once again,  
with your good rest,  
so that as the sun rises in the morn  
we may welcome the new light  
with refreshed bodies and be fully prepared  
to go forth into the world  
to love and serve the Lord our God  
with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love –  
in thought, word, and deed –  
with heart, soul, mind and strength.  
May it be so, we pray together in Christ’s name, saying,  
Amen.*

**THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – Jesus stands in the gap for us all -

Romans 10:4-15 – 4 For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

5 Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” 6 But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say?

“The word is near you,  
on your lips and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? 15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Paul writes of the brokenness of the ancient people of God because of their continued desire and attempt to achieve God’s righteousness through the law – given to them by God to help them to live with healthy boundaries, joy, compassion for one another, harmony, generosity, and peace. Human sin entered in and the ancient people went far astray. Levitical priests sought to curtail the people’s evil ways and created, over the years, 613 commandments for the people to live by. “That should do it; now the people will live according to the laws we’ve created and then receive God’s blessing / righteousness by how they live their lives,” the authors of these commandments must have said to one another quite proudly.

The problem, Paul writes, is that God’s righteousness does not come through human actions/works, but comes instead only from God – and furthermore, is freely given by God to all people – ALL people. God created each and every human being in God’s holy image (*imago dei*) and therefore, God’s righteousness is for each one whom God created. It is Jesus who stands in the gap between the law – the 613 commandments – all the prophets - and the righteousness of God. Jesus stands in the gap for all people because Jesus is the fulfillment of all law and prophecy, and Jesus teaches that all law and prophecy is summed up in his commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27)

Since the original sin, the “whole creation has been groaning as in labor pains up to the present time.” (Romans 8:22) Paul writes, and while he writes to first century Christians, their labor pains are present with us now in the 21st century, too, for we are still a broken people. We see brokenness all around us with profound divisiveness, animosity, and vitriol criticism that spews forth in word and deed towards those who have differing opinions, beliefs, theologies, ideologies, and even they ways in which we know our own selves to be true – our gender identities, sexual orientations, race, and ethnicities. The ways we are human beings, all made in God’s holy image, are as diverse as only God can imagine, and yet, we human beings try to imagine that one way of being is better – above – superior – to other ways of being human. This is human sin entering into our hearts, minds, and soul. This is not God’s way – but it is human sin and becomes the way of the world. It is our ultimate brokenness before God.

The people lament – we cry out to God in our pain and suffering – we ask for God’s help. And, then Jesus goes and stands in the gap – for each and every one of us.

If we are paying attention, we see Jesus – we see the movement of the Holy Spirit of God blowing wild and free where it will - and then, we want God to change our hearts, minds, and souls. And so, we ask God to forgive us for all we’ve done wrong and all we’ve left undone; we seek to know God’s ways, and, not by our own power, actions, or deeds, but by the power of the Holy Spirit of God, we seek to be transformed and to walk with God in Christ Jesus, henceforth and forevermore – we seek to live in harmony, compassion, generosity, joy, peace, and love with our sisters and brothers of the one and only race – God’s race of humanity.

Jesus stands in the gap for us all – thanks be to God.

*Holy God, as we begin this new day, which you’ve blessed us with, may we be your vessels of compassion, generosity, harmony, joy, peace, and love for everyone we meet; may we seek to be the change the world needs now – the change of love – your pure love. Guide and direct our words – our deeds – our voices – our thoughts so that all we say, think, and do will bring you honor and glory and joy. In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God with humility and stillness;

let us come.

*Holy God, the night draws nigh and many of us feel spent from the tasks of the day, and so we ask your blessings of pleasant places for our shadows to fall – but not just our own – pleasant places of safety and shelter for all those in need this night, we pray. May those who live in fear, hunger, and thirst find respite for their tired bodies; may those who live with illness and fatigue be blessed with healing; may those who struggle financially find a way forward; and may we all rest well and be awakened into the morning light of your overflowing mercies – new every day, and in gratitude, deep gratitude, may we live our lives in service to you. In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.*



**FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – Beautiful Feet!

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!  
(Romans 10:15)

Paul quotes from the prophet Isaiah “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” (Isaiah 52:7)

Isaiah speaks to the ancient Israelites who were deported to Babylon in exile; Paul speaks to the Gentiles in Rome. The message is the same to both audiences.

Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem ... and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever! Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)

In other words – just as the command was given by God through the prophets for the people to believe and to share the good news, so too is the command given by God through the Apostle Paul for the Gentiles (us) to go forth and do the same. We’ve been blessed by adoption into the family of God. First the family of God was only those of Jewish faith, and then it came to the Gentiles – us. Our response to God’s graciousness through Jesus Christ to us must be grateful obedience, and we must share this good news with every step we take, every word we say, every thought we have, every action we make. This is our calling.

**Blessed Feet**

How beautiful upon the mountain  
are the feet of those who bring good tidings.

Even feet are holy  
when those are the feet  
that carry good news.

When you go out, remember  
that your feet have holy work to do  
just like the words of your mouth  
and the meditations of your heart.

Go out now and tell what’s on your heart –  
tell the good news that God is with us!

Blessed be your feet!

*(Ann Weems, Searching for Shalom, [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991], 84).*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us settle in our souls –  
let us come before the Lord our God  
with stillness and humility –

let us come ...

*God of wonder, we are never beyond your reach,  
so we trust in you to bless us this night  
with secure and safe rest.  
Especially we ask your blessings  
to abide with those who have not have felt safe during  
this day -  
may your shield of protection envelop each one, we pray.  
In the confidence of your love and graciousness  
towards us, your children,  
we close our eyes for peaceful sleep;  
we close our eyes in trust of your holy presence tonight  
and always;  
we close our eyes  
and pray together in Jesus’ name, saying, Amen.*

**SATURDAY, MARCH 13, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – sing to the Lord!

Lament – expressions of grief, sorrow, isolation, loneliness, fear, anxiety – keep us from experiencing joy, seeing hope, and singing. The expressions of lament weigh us down – yes, they do.

However, these are necessary expressions of the emotions of human life.

Scripture is filled to the brim with expressions of lament – crying out to the Lord our God – asking God to relieve us from our pain and suffering – turning our lament over to God – laying it down at the foot of the cross of Jesus – and then breathing deeply, inhaling the comfort and peace of the Holy Spirit of God.

Such is the process of experiencing and moving through lament, and each step is necessary in order for us to move through our painful emotions – so that we are enabled and empowered to come out on the other side – onto the greener pastures that await us where we will once again, experience joy and be able to sing.

Psalm 95:1-7a –

O come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
For the Lord is a great God,  
and a great Ruler, above all gods.  
O God, in your hands are the depths of the earth;  
and the mountain peaks are yours.  
Yours is the sea, for you made it,  
and the dry land, as well, for your hands formed it.

O come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!  
For you are our God,  
and we are the people you shepherd,  
the flock under your care.

How Can I Keep From Singing

My life flows on in endless song;  
above earth's lamentation,  
I hear the clear, though far-off hymn  
that hails a new creation;

Through all the tumult and the strife,  
I hear the music ringing;  
it finds an echo in my soul—  
how can I keep from singing?

What though my joys and comforts die?  
I know my Savior liveth;  
What though the darkness gather round?  
Songs in the night he giveth.

No storm can shake my inmost calm  
while to that Rock I'm clinging.  
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,  
how can I keep from singing?

I lift mine eyes; the cloud grows thin  
I see the blue above it;  
and day by day this pathway smoothes  
since first I learned to love it

The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,  
a fountain ever springing;  
all things are mine since I am his—  
how can I keep from singing?

No storm can shake my inmost calm  
while to that Rock I'm clinging.  
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,  
how can I keep from singing?

*(American folksong originally composed as a Christian hymn by American Baptist minister Robert Wadsworth Lowry, 1868, [based on Psalm 145]).*

*Holy God, we thank you for this new day rising into your fullness; we thank you for awakening us into this day for service to you. Even if this very morning we feel weighed down by expressions of lament, we know you are beside us with your steadfast and faithful love. Hold our hands and our hearts and help us this very day move through our lament and out onto the green pastures of peace; and help us to begin to experience joy, see hope, and sing. In Christ's name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

Listen to “How Can I Keep From Singing?” Audrey Assad  
<https://youtu.be/Li2hddmy63U>

**Evening blessings ...**

Yours is the day, yours is the night;  
you made the luminaries of the sky,  
the sun, moon, and stars.  
(Psalm 74:16)

Be still and aware of God's presence within and all around.

*Glory be to you, O God of the night,  
for the whiteness of the moon  
and the infinite stretches of dark space.  
Let us be learning to love the night  
as we know and love the day.  
Let us be learning to trust its darkness  
and to seek its subtle blessings.  
Let us be learning the night's way of seeing  
that in all things I may trace the mystery  
of your holy presence. Amen.*

*(J. Philip Newell, Celtic Benediction, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 44).*

**MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – “show me”

You show me the path of life, O God.

In your presence there is fullness of joy! (Psalm 16:11)

Sometimes – oftentimes – or – if we are being truly honest - all the time – we need to be shown the path of life – as we cannot find it for ourselves. As the psalmist writes, it is God alone who reveals the pathway to us. Recognizing this fact means that we must let go of control and place our trust completely in God to lead and guide our lives. Through the centuries we human creatures have done our best to be in control of our lives – most especially those of us in Western cultures – and trusting fully in God to provide for our every daily need can be really, really hard. The psalmist reveals, however, that when we are finally able to let go and let God be our sole provider, redeemer, and sustainer, we are free to enjoy the fullness of joy – and goodness knows, that is exactly where we find the newness of hope!

*Show us, then, O God your pathway of life! Help us to drop our nets of control and place our trust completely in you to provide for our every need for this day and every day. As we move through our day, may our inner senses be awakened to you, and may we experience the fullness of your joy. Amen.*

*The vitality of God be ours this day –  
the vitality of the God of love.*

*The passion of Christ be ours this day –  
the passion of the Christ of love.*

*The wakefulness of the Spirit be ours this day –  
the wakefulness of the Spirit of justice.*

*The vitality and passion and wakefulness of God be ours –  
that we may be fully alive this day.*

*The vitality and passion and wakefulness of God be ours –  
that we may be fully alive. Amen.*

*(J. Philip Newell, Celtic Benediction, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 53).*

**Evening blessings ...**

Holy God, as the night sky draws near to the horizon,  
draw us near to you;

Holy God, as the stars begin to shine,  
shine bright in our hearts

so we may know your light and your love.

Holy God, awaken us with the rising sun into your service  
for yet another day.

In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.

**TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – prayer time

Matthew 6:46 – ...after bidding them farewell, he left for the mountain to pray.

Matthew 14:23 – ...after he had sent the crowds away, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray; and when it was evening, he was there alone.

Mark 1:36 – ...in the early morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place to pray.

Luke 5:16 – Oftentimes, Jesus would slip away to the wilderness and pray.

Let us slip away together and begin this day in prayer ...

*Holy God, I give you thanks for this new day, which is rising into your fullness. I thank you for awakening me into this new day for service to you. I lift up to you in prayer those who are hurting this day – especially those mourning the loss of loved ones in Lebanon, and those trying to pick up the pieces of their lives there, too; those who are waking up to begin to recover their lives after the hurricane passed through on the east coast of this country; those who are battling wild fires and doing all they can to save their homes, animals, and themselves on the west coast.*

*I pray, too, for those who are doing all they can to keep people safe from this coronavirus and those who are working so hard to care for people who are sick – especially where the hospitals are at capacity and really, really struggling to care for people on the southern border and across the south – from east to west. Help us all, I pray to take this awful virus very seriously and to do all we can to keep one another and ourselves safe and healthy.*

*I pray, then, for the good health of my family – each one – siblings, children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and cousins – those I know and those I've never met, my parishioners, my staff and clergy colleagues, my friends around the world – here, there, and everywhere. And, I thank you, Holy God, for my ancestors and all the saints of my life who've gone before me and now live eternally with you – especially for their abiding love and their faith, handed down through the generations to me. I pray that I am able to do the very same for my children and grandchildren and their children, too.*

*I pray for this community, this state, this country, and our world, Holy God – we are in deep need of your continued*

*intervention in our lives; we are in deep need of the indwelling of your Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and show us your more perfect way to live, be, and do for the sake of humanity – each human being whom you've created – each one in your perfect holy image.*

*I pray this morning for those enduring any form of “ism” today – racism, genderism, ageism, youthism, sexual-orientationism, classism - may your blessings of strength and fortitude be with each one – and may the perpetrators of these isms experience a change in their very souls that will cause them to hear your voice calling to them to see each human being as you see us – beloved.*

*For those experiencing violence in their homes and their lives, I pray, Holy God, for your shield of protection to envelop them today and to help them to find places of safety and shelter for today, tonight, and all their days. I pray this prayer for them, Lord God, until the violence ends.*

*For all people, “may your justice roll down like mighty rushing waters, and righteousness like an every flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24)*

*For those being born today and those dying today, bless them into life – on earth and eternally with you, I pray. For those burying loved ones today, bless them with your comfort and your peace, I pray.*

*For educators, students, and parents, I pray for their health and safety as they enter into this brand new kind of season of school. May they be blessed with all they need and may all the safety protocols be adhered to and be all it needs to be for the health and well-being of each one.*

*And, for the pastors – and truly all your people, Lord God - doing all we can to be beside your people, bless us with all we need for each day – your abiding presence, love, graciousness, hospitality, Ubuntu, generosity, and patience; bless us with the attentive focus and non-anxious presence of Jesus for every person and every task you place before us as you call us to be your vessels of all that you bless us with. May our words be your words for your people in this time and place; may our hands be Christ's hands and our feet be his, too – going and doing and being in all the ways he both calls us and sends us forth, equipped, empowered, emboldened, and enabled.*

*For all your people, Lord God, send us forth with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love to go and be the very ones you call us to be. In Christ's name, we offer these prayers, and together we say, Amen.*

## Evening blessings ...

Be still;  
be still and aware;

be still and aware of God's presence;

be still and aware of God's presence within and all around;

be still ...

When I look at the heavens, the work of your hands,  
the moon and the stars that you have made;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
children of the earth that you care for them?  
Yet you have created us a little lower than the angels,  
and crowned us with glory and honor.  
(Psalm 8:3-5)

*Holy God, as the night skies open with the brightness of  
the stars,  
open our hearts to you;  
as the light of a new day dawns with the morning sun,  
open our hearts to you;  
With all that we say and all that we do,  
may we be open to your guidance and wisdom,  
and may we be your vessels of love, justice, and mercy.  
In Christ's name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope – Trauma to Ice Cream!

How does Lament to Hope translate to Trauma to Ice Cream ... and what is the common trait that lies in between?

Faith – Hope – Trust - Delayed Gratification

Faith is the reality of all that is hoped for; faith is the proof of all that is unseen. (Hebrews 11:1)

In hope we were saved. But hope is not hope if its object is seen; why does one hope for what one sees? And hoping for what we cannot see means awaiting it with patience endurance. (Romans 8:24-25)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to the Lord, and the Lord will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Rejoice in hope; be patient in tribulation; be constant in prayer. (Romans 12:12)

In the midst of a traumatic and/or sorrowful situation, it is hard to be patient – it is hard to have faith – it is hard to look towards the future with hope, and yet – this is our calling as children of God and followers of Jesus Christ. His disciples didn't go forth into the world sharing his gospel message only for those in their immediate hearing range – they knew that the hope was that God's love through Christ would be carried forth for generations to come. God told Moses that he would not be the one to lead God's people into the land God promised – that it would be another one who would do so – that the mantle would be passed from one generation to the next. So, for us, our strong faith that we share, through both our actions and words, is for the generations yet to come – our hope is that our faith will be handed down to our children's children just as it was to us.

In times of struggle – trauma – sadness – how do we respond? What expressions of faith in our Lord and Savior do we model for those around us? Paul writes to the church at Philippi from his prison cell in Rome that his suffering is for God's glory because through his words and actions others are made bold to proclaim the gospel message. (Philippians 1:12-14). His expressions of faith in the midst of trauma are exactly the model we want to exhibit, too. I hold on to Paul's model in times of trauma. I strive to be the non-anxious presence of Jesus and to be blessed with his attentive focus for the task of pastoring what is before me.

When I began serving as a chaplain intern in 2010, I was assigned to a children's level 1 trauma hospital and to an adult hospital that was number two in the city for birthing babies. The CEO of the hospitals was a former chaplain and so he keenly understood the importance of the calming

presence chaplains bring to any traumatic event, and he changed the way both trauma and death were responded to in these hospitals. As a result, chaplains were present for every child trauma that might result in loss of life or limb, as well as every death, regardless of age. The hospitals had many staff chaplains, as well as six of us chaplain interns, so the traumatic experiences were spread out among us all – during the daytime hours. For the overnight hours, however, once a week we chaplain interns had the care of the people in these hospitals all to ourselves. Of course, we could call for back-up, but for the most part, it was on us.

Remember when I asked earlier - How does Lament to Hope translate to Trauma to Ice Cream ... and what is the common trait that lies in-between?

Faith – Hope – Trust - Delayed Gratification ...

All these lie in-between ... and what got me through many a trauma was delayed gratification and patience blessed to me by God ... and the hoped for ice cream on the other side of the trauma – no matter the time of the night.

When you strive to be the non-anxious presence of Jesus and share your faith through both word and deed like Paul, it can be hard ... but we are made to endure hard things ... as we are called as followers of Jesus and children of God, blessed into God's family through adoption, to follow their examples and the examples of countless other saints who've gone before us showing the way of faith, hope, patience, and delayed gratification, and always pointing towards Christ Jesus.

The promise-to-self of ice cream on the other side of a traumatic event has helped me move through them with grace, patience, attentive focus, and non-anxiousness. Perhaps this simple, yet profound gesture of self-care and kindness to your own self will do the same for you.

*May God bless and keep you;  
may God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you;  
may God look kindly upon you, and give you peace.  
(Numbers 6:24-26)*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us pray ...

*The stillness of God be ours this night  
that we may sleep in peace.  
The awareness of the angels be ours this night  
that we may be alert to God's unseen mysteries.  
The company of the saints be ours this night  
that we may dream of the river of love.  
The life of Christ be ours this night  
that we may be truly alive to the morning  
that we may be truly alive in Christ. Amen.*

*(J. Philip Newell, Celtic Benediction, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 83).*

**THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – the church rejoicing

This the day the Lord has made – let us rejoice and be glad in it! (Psalm 118:24)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

Where can we go to hear the good news of the salvation of the Lord?

From the prophets of old ...

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” (Isaiah 52:7)

Where can we go to hear the good news of the salvation of the Lord?

From the Apostle Paul ...

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!  
(Romans 10:15)

Where can we go to hear the good news of the salvation of the Lord?

From Jesus Christ – God sent God’s only Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

The good news of the salvation of the Lord is here for us all! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!  
Amen.

Come and worship the Lord our God – wherever you are – for the Lord is within and all around!

**Evening blessings ...**

*May the love of God,  
the peace of Christ,  
and the strong comfort and fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
abide with us all this night  
and into tomorrow  
and all our days.*

*And, may we  
in humble  
obedient  
gratitude  
love and serve the Lord our God  
and love neighbor as self*

*each day  
each night  
each week  
each month  
each year  
now and forevermore.*

*In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – consolation

**Lament –**

After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth ...; For my sighing comes like my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water. Truly the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, I have no rest, but trouble comes. (Job 3:1; 24-26))

**Consolation –**

Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. From a distance they saw Job, but did not recognize him. There they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. When they came to Job, they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was great. (Job 2:11-13).

**Hope –**

I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; 14 and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. (Philippians 1:12-14)

Recognizing the giant leap that exists between lament and hope, I keep coming back around to what lies in-between ...the out-pouring of expressions of lament, empathy of others, feeling heard, and more. Consolation is another aspect of this in-betweenness, and so I return to Job's story. The first passage reflects Job's out-pouring of lament, his intent to express his feelings freely without quiet, and his intent to stay the course and accept what is yet to come.

The second passage is the in-between – it is when Job's friends come to his side and serve as true friends who sit quietly with Job. True friends do not attempt to fix, correct, or even counsel, unless the one who is suffering asks for their help. True friends sit with in the uncomfortable space with their friend – whether they are weeping quietly, sobbing uncontrollably, or yelling loudly at their situation. True friends serve as companions in the journey.

Such companions in our journeys of sorrow are treasures in our lives. When they come, as Job's friends came, without being asked, it is a double blessing. But, it is okay to ask, too, whenever we are in need of such companionship. We may also need to ask for specifically what we need – companionship – not answers, correction, and certainly not fixing. Otherwise, the suffering one will feel even worse about themselves and will also feel unheard.

The third passage shares a complete narrative and transition of the Apostle Paul's suffering to his joy in the spread of the gospel message. He does not linger in his suffering like Job. He only gives it five words' worth of mention "... what has happened to me..." and only then to explain his joy in what has come because of his suffering. One has to know the historical context of this passage to know that Paul writes from his prison cell in Rome and that he anticipates his coming death to understand the depth of, not only his suffering, but his great joy as his own hope of the spread of the gospel message is coming to fruition through his suffering.

In Paul's narrative, the jailer becomes Paul's consoler – listening intently to Paul's story. I can imagine Paul shares his personal story with the jailer of his transformation because of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom he met on a dusty Damascus road. I can imagine the jailer listening and learning from Paul – not trying to fix or counsel him.

In Job's story, his friends are only true friends for a time, and then they turn on Job, becoming judges, correctors, fixers of his life. Job's suffering is only intensified because of how his friends turn on him. Do they do so because they became tired of his expressions of lament? Or because they needed to get back to their homes and families and wanted to move Job along towards being better – by fixing his behavior?

Sisters and brothers – who are we when our friends suffer?

*Let us be those who listen and come along beside;  
let us be blessings to those who suffer and need consolers;  
let us be blessings and help others to feel heard;  
let us be those who share the love of God by our comfort;  
and, let us be those who are blessed with transformation,  
like the jailer.  
In Christ's name, we pray together, saying, Amen.*

Evening blessings ...

*Deep peace of the running wave to you;  
deep peace of the flowing air to you;  
deep peace of the quiet earth to you;  
deep peace of the shining stars to you;  
deep peace to you;  
deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.*

*May peace fill your soul;  
let peace make you whole,  
now and forevermore. Amen.*

*(Brendan O'Malley, compiler, Celtic Blessings: Making All Things Sacred, Norwich, Norfolk: Canterbury Press, 1998)*



**SATURDAY, MARCH 20, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Out of chaos – hope -

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise the words of prophets, 21 but test everything; hold fast to what is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil. 23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. 25 Beloved, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. 27 I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.  
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-28)

The Presbyterian Disaster Assistance teams go. They just go – to every disaster where help is needed for a community to begin to rebuild their lives out of the chaos of whatever disaster has befallen them. Holding fast to 1 Thessalonians 5:17 – “pray without ceasing,” they pray before they go, while they are traveling, while they are on the ground beginning their work, and continually with the people in dire need of their presence. And, their prayers, along with their presence continues for the long-haul of a disaster. Other assistance will come and help in the immediate aftermath, and then complete their tasks. The PDA stays for the long-haul – as long as the community needs them to stay – they stay ... and always they pray. Their motto is “out of chaos, hope,” for hope is what they bring, and it is what they share with one and all.

As I write about lament to hope and what comes in-between the two, I began to consider what comes before lament – what brings us to lament? Human life, e.g. illness, pandemic. Human death. Human sin, e.g. gun violence. Natural disaster. Each instance causes chaos in our lives, so chaos precedes lament. Prayer then, intercedes lament; prayer with the one who comes to console – not counsel or fix – but truly console pierces the chaos and the lament, and helps us to see a glimmer of light beyond our present darkness.

Christ has no hands but ours; Christ has no feet but ours; If not us, who? If not now, when?

*Holy God, as the morning sun rises in the east, we give you thanks and praise for awakening us into this new day for service to you. May we be attentive, as Christ is attentive, to the needs of those we encounter today; may we see clearly those experiencing chaos in their lives, and may*

*we, then, become your vessels of love and hope, as we stop whatever we are doing, offering presence, consolation, and prayer. Amen.*

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

God will help it when the morning dawns.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.  
(Psalm 46:1-3, 5, 7)

*For more information about the wonderful ministry of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance – to give to their ministry – to read and learn prayers for those in chaos – here, there, and everywhere ... see <https://pda.pcusa.org/>*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us come before the Lord our God with stillness and humility to usher in the evening; let us come ...

*Holy God, we thank you for this day and the blessings upon blessings you've bestowed upon us. As the evening begins, we thank you for more blessings – of family and friends, of home and hearth, of technology that connects us, of your abiding faithfulness and love. We pray that we might be blessed with good rest so that we may rise with peace and harmony, with love and joy, with faith and hope and then enter into the new day equipped, enabled, emboldened, and empowered to be your vessels of these very blessings you've bestowed upon us. May it be so, we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

No lament today – only Hope and Joy –

On this day a child is born!

On this day she is blessed to be beloved by God  
beginning now and forevermore!

On this day she enters into the world  
and the world is forever changed and blessed by her, too!

Thanksgiving and Joy for her safe arrival!  
Hope for her future!

*Watch over your child, O God, each day of her life;  
bless and guide her wherever she may be;  
comfort her when she is discouraged or sorrowful;  
raise her up when she falls;  
and in her heart  
may your peace,  
joy,  
faith,  
hope,  
and love abide  
all her days.*

*In Christ's name, we pray together, saying, Amen and  
Amen and Amen!*

**Evening blessings ...**

Welcome to one and all!

Let us come before the Lord our God –

*Holy God, we thank you for this day  
and the blessings that have come to us;  
we thank you for your love  
revealed to us through kind words and deeds;  
and we thank you for the blessings yet to come;  
we thank you!*

*Bless us this night with comfortable rest;  
and, when the sun rises,  
bless us with a new day  
to seek your holy presence  
within and all around us,  
and to serve you by serving  
those we know  
and those we will meet tomorrow.  
Guide us with your wisdom and words,  
and may your love flow through us  
so that everyone may know your love.  
In Christ's name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – gratitude

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

Paul makes it sound so easy – do not worry – turn every concern over to God in prayer with thanksgiving – and peace – incomprehensible peace – will follow.

In this passage it has always been the two words “with thanksgiving” that have tripped me up. How do we pray “with thanksgiving” for the anxiety we are feeling – and/ or whatever has brought about the anxiety?

Earlier in Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi, Paul writes about how he gives thanks to God for his own suffering because it has resulted in his opportunity to preach the gospel to his prison jailer and “the whole imperial guard.” (Philippians 1:12-14).

Paul’s writing always gives me pause when I experience worry, anxiousness, or suffering. How can I, like Paul, give thanks to God in the midst of my own experience? We’ve heard it said, “You can’t change a situation, you can only change how you respond to it,” and Paul chooses to respond to every situation with gratitude to God. My friend, singer/songwriter David LaMotte says “You are changing the world whether you like it or not,” which seems to go hand-in-hand with Paul’s thinking – that is, whatever our circumstance, all we can do is respond, and how we respond will either give glory and honor to God – and hopefully bring God joy – or it will not.

I choose to strive to live my life daily in this way: “Encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them. Seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14-21)

Even in times of angst, sorrow, lament, grief, let us do all we can to seek to discover gratitude.

Let us begin today to name five things every morning and every night that we are grateful for ... and strive to name ten!

I am grateful to God for this new day;  
I am grateful to God for being awakened into this new day for service to God;  
I am grateful to God for my home;  
I am grateful to God for my family - those whom I know and dearly love - and those cousins I've never met - and

I ask God’s blessings upon each one this day for all they need every moment of this day;  
I am grateful to God for my friends - near and far - and ask God’s blessings to abide with each one throughout this day and the coming night - for all the things;  
I am grateful to God for my parishioners – each one, and ask God’s blessings to be with them, providing for their every need today;  
I am grateful to God for this good meal set before me, and ask that the lives of those who’ve prepared it, farm to table, be blessed this day;  
I am grateful to God for Holy Scripture – for the written history of the ancient Israelites, the prophetic writings, the poetry and wisdom literature, the gospel writings, the writings of the apostles, the epistles, the general letters, and the revelation;  
I am grateful to God for God’s Word made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ and his saving grace;  
I am grateful to God for the faith of my ancestors being handed down generation after generation until it reached me;  
I am grateful to God to be able to transgenerate my faith to my own descendants;  
I am grateful to God to be blessed this day, and pray to be a blessing to everyone I encounter today – blessing to blessing to blessing – until everyone knows God’s abiding and steadfast love.

I am grateful to God.

*May God bless and keep you this day; may God lift up your face and bless you with gratitude, hope, joy, peace, and love. Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

*Holy God, nighttime has come –  
a time for stillness for our bodies and souls;  
a time for stillness, thanksgiving, confession, and praise before you.*

*We thank you for the blessings  
you’ve bestowed upon us this day.*

*Forgive us for all we have done wrong today  
and all we have left undone.*

*We sing your praises, Holy God,  
and offer to you our very selves in service.*

*Bless us now with a good night’s rest  
and awaken us with the morning light  
when we will be renewed, refreshed, and ready  
to go forth into the world  
loving you with heart, mind, soul, and strength,  
and loving our neighbors as ourselves.*

*In Christ’s holy name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – what’s in a date?

What’s in a date?

Nothing and Everything;

Memories and Emotions of Sadness, Grief, Fear ... let there be JOY!

What’s in a date?

For every date on the calendar a memory is evoked by someone, somewhere in the world. For those dates that conjure sadness or grief – you know, the dates we dread to come around again, what if ... we do something brand new on those dates to add to or cover over the sadness and dread? What if, instead of dread of the date coming around again – because we know it will – what if ... we plan to do something joyful on that date – something memorable and joyful? And, what if we do this again year after year on that date and then on other dates on the calendar that need this same treatment of “newness of life?”

I imagine taking a lovely hand-embroidered handkerchief, given to me by my Mom that she bought in Arizona while living there in her very early married life, and gently covering a well-worn, and now unsightly side table. Like the date that is being covered over by a new activity or event, the side table remains, but is no longer the prominent object in view – the lovely handkerchief is, and it, then, is the first thing I see, which brings a smile of joy to my face.

What date is on your calendar that you dread for its arrival? What might you do on that date that will bring you joy? Joy and happiness that will cover over earlier sadness or grief or fear? The other memory will still remain with you, but it will no longer be the prominent memory in your mind’s eye – or your heart. The joyful one will spring forth first, and then when the former memory comes to mind, it will be softened by the new one that acts as its covering.

God, through the prophet Isaiah said, “Do not remember the former things, for I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18-19).

God desires for us to always be paying attention to where and how God’s Spirit is moving and blowing wild and free, within and all around us.

Where is God’s Spirit at work in your life and all around you? What new thing is God “springing forth” for you?

Think about the date on your calendar that potentially brings you sadness and grief – causes you to lament – what new thing might you do on that date to bring yourself joy and happiness instead?

Remember ...

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,  
the Lord’s mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is the faithfulness of the Lord.  
(Lamentations 3:22-23)

*Holy God, as we enter into this new day, let us remember that for someone, somewhere, this date on the calendar will evoke a poor memory – a memory that causes sad-*

*ness and grief, or even fear, to spring forth. For whomever this happens, may they be reminded of your faithfulness in every step of their life and faith journeys, and may they be blessed with your courage and wisdom to seek your newness that is springing forth in their midst; may they lay over the sad memory with a brand new one that, while covering, will never erase the previous memory, but will merely subside it and allow the new memory to spring forth joy and happiness to spring as fresh new waters splashing out to quench the thirst of the traveler. If we are this someone, somewhere, O God, may we be so bold and emboldened to care for ourselves in this way on this date on the calendar, or any date that we need to experience your newness of life, for great is your faithfulness, day in and day out, whatever may come our way. Praise be to God! And together, God’s people say, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

Let us breathe, and breathe again.

Let us put aside all angst that the day has brought;  
let us breathe and be still before the Lord our God.

Matthew 6:25-34 – 25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

*Holy God, as we begin to rest tonight, help us to put aside any worry that attempts to rise within us, remembering the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Bless us with comfort and rest, we pray. We lift before you in our prayers the needs of others – those struggling with finances, jobs, health, addiction, healthcare, mental well-being, safety, security, homelessness, loneliness, family and relationship discord, and any other personal matters. Bless each one with just what they need for each day and each night, reminding them/us of your constant presence in their/our lives, come what may. May this knowledge help to remove the anxiety and worry, and help us to place all our concerns at the foot of Jesus’ cross, so that we are enabled and equipped to love and serve him with our whole beings, placing all our trust in him. Awaken us into the new day tomorrow feeling refreshed and ready to live fully and to serve Christ with our hearts, minds, souls, and strength, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. In Christ’s name we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope – Seeing Light at the End of the Tunnel!

Feeling overwhelmed causes us to lament our emotions of angst of not being able to do every single task that is before us in the time allotted. The angst of having to do a lot or to do hard things can be expressed in healthy or unhealthy ways. Angst manifest as anger is an example of an unhealthy expression. And, when angst or fear is manifest as anger, it is most often projected onto those we love. When one comes to know oneself at a deep level – comes to know one's triggers to angst rising up within ourselves, then the angst can be subsided by self-soothing, self-calming techniques such as deep breathing, reminding oneself that we are okay, that we are worthy human beings, that God loves us, that we can do hard things, that we will see light at the end of the tunnel of darkness that presently surrounds us, and that we will be okay on the other side of these hard things that are before us.

Being able to stop in the moment of feeling angst and tend to self is vitally important to being able to accomplish the hard things that are before us, in order that we will experience, not only light, but also hope and joy on the other side of them.

Esther did not know what would be on the other side of the huge task that her cousin Mordecai placed before her – saving all the Jewish people living in the twenty-seven provinces under the rule of King Ahasuerus - from India to Ethiopia. Twice she refused to accept the monumental task. Then she understood that it was, indeed, hers alone, and accepted that it was only she herself that could accomplish the feat. Esther was a young queen, but she had the wherewithal to step back, breathe deeply, assess the situation, as well as her own angst, make a plan to move towards the actual attempt, and then bring it into fruition. And, while God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, she takes steps that very much involve God's presence before, behind, beside, underneath, above, all around, and within her: she asks all the Jews in Susa to fast with her for three days and three nights, and we know that with fasting comes prayer to God. Esther prepares herself in this way and knows that she is fully supported by her people, and then she is prepared to step forward into the lion's den of the king's presence saying, "After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

We, too, can do hard things;  
we, too, can accomplish the tasks before us.  
The beginning place is in prayer to God;  
the beginning place is knowing that when we cannot pray,  
when we are so overwhelmed with angst, that is when the Holy Spirit will intervene on our behalf: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

The beginning place is with God.

*Holy God, as this new day dawns, we feel refreshed and ready to begin ... and then we remember all that is before us for this day – the many tasks and assignments to be*

*accomplished ... and we become anxious ... and we lament even waking up. Help us now, we pray. Come Holy Spirit, come. Breath newness of life into our very souls even now and set us on your right path for this new day. Bless us with the Esther's leadership to step back, assess, come before you in prayer, make a plan, and then set forth to accomplish the tasks you've given to us, all the while knowing that you love us just as we are. Remind us that just as Esther – and Jesus - did really hard things, so, too, can we. Lead us on, Lord Jesus, lead us on. Together your people pray this prayer saying, Amen.*

You can do this hard thing – I believe that it's so – I believe in you.

Listen to Carrie Newcomer sing "You Can Do This Hard Thing" <https://youtu.be/jjEv2lsJGFA>

**Evening blessings ...**

I was reading tonight in Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat's *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life*, and came across this beautiful spiritual thought ...

"I was just thinking  
one morning  
during meditation  
how much alike  
hope  
and baking powder are:

quietly  
getting what is  
best in me  
to rise,  
awakening  
the hint of eternity  
within.

I always think of that  
when I eat biscuits now  
and wish  
that I could be  
more faithful  
to the hint of eternity,  
the baking power  
in me."

*(Marcrina Wiederkehr, Seasons of Your Heart: Prayers and Reflections, [New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1991], 57 in Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life, [New York, NY: Scribner, 1996], 221).*

*Let us pray, Holy God, as the day winds down and the moon rises above, let us be reminded of how your Holy Spirit resides in us all, causing us to rise and awaken to the hint of eternity within. Bless us now with good, good rest, and may we wake with the morning sun in the east, refreshed and restored, and ready to go forth into the world to love and serve you with our whole hearts, minds, souls, and strengths. May it be so, we pray together, saying, Amen.*

**FRIDAY, MARCH 26, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to hope – our weariness and the yoke of Jesus: wisdom, justice, obedience, submission, gentleness, and humility.

“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30).

The “yoke” Jesus refers to is the “yoke of wisdom, justice, obedience, submission, gentleness, and humility.” When we are feeling weary from the strains of life, this global pandemic, and even the strains of death, Jesus invites us to come and lay down our burdens at his feet, where we will find rest for our souls. Jesus invites us to learn from him how to live with the strife and strains of our own lives by listening to his teachings and, thus, acquiring his wisdom, justice, obedience, submission, gentleness, and humility for ourselves.

Paul teaches that even in the midst of immense strife we can still proclaim the gospel message (Philippians 1:12-14).

Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus (0055-0135) said “We cannot choose our external circumstances, but we can always choose how we respond to them.”

Paul could not control his imprisonment, but he chose to respond to it by proclaiming the gospel message to those who guarded him, and through Paul, the lives of his jailer and the jailer’s family were transformed by the power of the gospel.

We can do the same. Especially in the midst of our own strife, sorrows, and hard times. Those around us may expect something quite different from us, but we can surprise them, and even ourselves, when we respond to hard times by proclaiming the gospel message through our actions and our words, and in this way, we are taking on the yoke of Jesus – his wisdom, justice, obedience, submission, gentleness, and humility – we are learning from him and living out the fulfilment of his mission, which is, of course, our calling as his followers.

“Let love be genuine; hold fast to what is good; love one another; outdo one another in showing honor; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in suffering; persevere in prayer; contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice

with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. And, if it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” (Romans 12:9-18)

*Sisters and brothers, let us, each one, go forth into this new day, blessed to us by God, to love and serve the Lord our God through our own words and actions. Let us take the yoke of Jesus upon us and learn from him how we are called to live our own lives with wisdom, justice, obedience, submission, gentleness, and humility. May it be so, we pray together in Christ’s holy name saying, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

I commune with my heart in the night, I meditate and search my spirit. (Psalm 77:6)

The psalmist came before God in stillness at night to listen to God’s voice in the quiet. May we come with the same stillness and desire to listen; may we come to meditate and search our spirits; let us come ...

*Thanks be to you, Lord God, for the night and its light, for stars that emerge out of evening skies and the white moon’s radiance.*

*Thanks be to you for the earth’s unfolding of color and the bright sheen of creatures from ocean depths.*

*In the darkness of the world and in the night of our own souls let us be looking with longing for light; let us be looking in hope.*

*(J. Philip Newell, “Sunday Prayers,” Celtic Benediction: Morning and Night Prayer, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 8).*

**SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope – God in Christ Jesus abides!

Romans 8: 28-35, 37-39 -

28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. 31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Did you hear the good news??

In all things we are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us – there it is - good news!

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus – nothing – more good news!

So, whether we are on top of the world in spirit –  
or at the bottom of our own pit in spirit –  
nothing – nothing – nothing can ever separate us from  
the love of God in Christ Jesus ...  
and – and – and – we are more than conquerors though  
Christ who loves us!

Let us rejoice in the love of God in Christ Jesus this day –  
for we are beloved children of God, blessed by adoption  
into the family of God – praise be to God!

*Knowing that you are deeply loved,  
may you enter into this day  
ready to serve the Lord your God  
with joy in your soul,  
a song in your heart,  
a kick in your step ...  
and may you dance, dance, dance!*

*In Christ's name we pray together saying, Amen!*

**Evening blessings ...**

Be still and aware of God's presence  
within and all around.

"I commune with my heart in the night,  
I meditate and search my spirit." (Psalm 77:6)

*"May the grace of the night's stillness be ours  
may the grace of the moon's guidance be ours  
may the grace of heaven's vastness be ours  
to renew our soul in sleep  
to enlighten our dreams in the night  
to open our spirits to eternity  
until the angels of light awaken us  
until the morning angels awaken us."*

*(J. Philip Newell, Celtic Benediction, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 11).*

**MONDAY, MARCH 29, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope – the ABSOLUTELY UNCONDITIONAL love of God abides!

Lo and behold ...

the hard things are still present with us this morning;  
the hope is still present, too;  
the song in our hearts is still present;  
the light must be  
at the end of the tunnel –  
it simply must be.

Bird-by-bird – one task at a time ...  
let's do these hard things!

*God of unconditional love,  
long before we were ready you ran to meet us  
and embraced us;  
when we did not deserve it  
you lavished your love upon us.  
Teach us how to receive your embrace  
and extend it, with compassion and generosity,  
to the others we find it hard to forgive.  
(Luke 15:11-32)*

*(Nicola Slee, "Praying Like a Woman," [London, England: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004], 114).*

*"Into the Ordinary"  
O Amazing God, you come into our ordinary lives  
and set a holy table among us,  
filling our plates with the Bread of Life  
and our cups with Salvation.  
Send us out, O God,  
with tenderheartedness  
to touch an ordinary everyday world  
with the promise of your holiness.*

*(Ann Weems, Searching for Shalom, [Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1991], 81).*

Amen and Amen and Amen.

Blessings be with you on your day!  
Blessings be!

**Evening Blessings ...**

*In the infinity of night skies  
in the free flashing of lightning  
in whirling elemental winds  
you are God.  
In the impenetrable mists of dark clouds  
in the wild gusts of lashing rain  
in the ageless rocks of the sea  
you are God and we bless you.  
You are in all things  
and contained by no thing.  
You are the Life of all life  
and beyond every name.  
You are God and in the eternal mystery we praise you.*

*(J. Philip Newell, Celtic Benediction, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 20).*

*Holy God, as we come to a time of relaxation and rest, we first come before you in thanksgiving for this day and the blessings you've bestowed upon each one of us. Through our prayers, we offer to you our prayers for others – those who are suffering with illness, mental anguish, loneliness, isolation, angst, fear, and all other maladies that are already known to you, for you know our innermost thoughts and emotions.*

*Bless each one, Holy God, with just what they need for this night,  
and bless us all with a comfortable night's rest,  
with your peace, and your love.*

*When the morning comes, we pray that we might feel refreshed and ready to set forth into the new day serving you with all we have and all we are continually giving you thanksgiving and praise, honor and glory. In Christ's name we pray together saying, Amen.*



**TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Hard things to Lament –

“to walking in their midst – simultaneously –  
because they are both present simultaneously –  
one foot, then the other –  
then again ...  
the muck of the hard thing  
the muck of the lament  
remain

until  
we look up  
and see a bright blue sky  
hear a songbird sing  
feel a cool breeze  
remember  
we aren't alone.

One foot, then the other  
then again ...

The hard becomes a bit softer,  
the lament slightly more bearable;  
light appears  
hope emerges  
flower blossoms  
love is home.”

*God of New Beginnings*  
*God of new beginnings,*  
*help us to let go*  
*and to turn our backs*  
*on the things that hold us back,*  
*and to hold on*  
*to those things*  
*that remind us of your love,*  
*and help us to follow in your way.*  
Amen.

*(author unknown, Jane Bently & Neil Paynter, Around a Thin Place: An Iona Pilgrimage Guide, [Glasgow, Scotland: Wild Goose Publication, 2011], 13).*

**Evening blessings ...**

“The earth is full of your goodness, O God.” (Psalm 33:5)

Be still and aware of God's presence within and all around;  
be still and aware of God's presence;  
be still and aware;  
be still ...

*Glory be to you O Holy Seed of all that has been born*  
*for earth, sea and sky in vibrancy of color.*  
*Glory be to you O Light of Life*  
*for your liberation of earth's bound treasures.*

*Glory be to you O River of delight*  
*surging through the heart of creation.*  
*Renew us this night in the depths of sleep,*  
*set free our dreams of the unknown.*  
*Safeguard this time of resting, O God,*  
*enfold us in the darkness of the night.*

*(J. Philip Newell, Celtic Benediction, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 35).*

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope – We walk by faith ...

Now the Lord said to Abram –

‘Go out of your country – go out from your family – go out from your family’s home – go out to a land that I will show you. Go out.’ And, Abram went.

(Genesis 12:1-5, paraphrased).

The sentence, “And, Abram went” is profound. How did Abram go when he did not know where he was going?

We walk by faith ...

By faith Abraham obeyed when God called him to go out to a place he did not know;

by faith Abraham dwelt in a foreign country;  
by faith Abraham waited on the Lord his God.

(Hebrews 11:8-10, paraphrased)

What does it mean to have faith?

Faith is the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is a verb – a very, very action-oriented word. It requires every fiber of our being to be in motion – to move forward, one step at a time. Faith is what moves us towards the light – the light at the end of our tunnels.

In faith we hope for what is unseen.

In faith we trust in God.

For in this hope we were saved; but hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they can already see? (Romans 8:24)

Remember, friends ...

We walk by faith and not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

*On The Way – A Sandwich Blessing*

*Bless these sandwiches, God.*

*I know I made them yesterday*

*I know they’ve been sat on.*

*I know, like me, they’re tired*

*and looking a bit crumbled and worn.*

*But bless these sandwiches, God,*

*and bless me too,*

*and keep me traveling hopefully on.*

(Ruth Burgess, “On The Way: A Sandwich Blessing,” Jane Bently & Neil Paynter, *Around a Thin Place: An Iona Pilgrimage Guide*, [Glasgow, Scotland: Wild Goose Publication, 2011], 63).

**Evening blessings ...**

Be still and aware of God’s holy presence within you and all around you; be still and know; be still and come.

*O Holy God, as the sun fades into the western sky and evening draws nigh we come.*

*We come – some of us weary bearing the burdens of the day in our long faces; some of us animated bearing the light of the sunbeams in our hearts.*

*We come as we are seeking your solace, your peace, your holy presence.*

*We come seeking your forgiveness for the things we’ve done and the things we’ve left undone.*

*We come seeking your grace in all things.*

*We come.*

*Bless us now, we pray with a good evening’s rest and a good morning’s awakening.*

*And bless us in the morning light with a renewal of spirit that will set us forth to love and serve you, Lord God with all we have and all we are.*

*In Christ’s abiding and faithful love, we pray together saying, Amen.*

**THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope - Walking together hand in hand ...

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 –

Two are better than one,  
because they have a good return for their labor:  
If either of them falls down,  
one can help the other up.  
But pity anyone who falls  
and has no one to help them up.  
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.  
But how can one keep warm alone?  
Though one may be overpowered,  
two can defend themselves.  
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34)

The South African philosophy of “Ubuntu” best translates into English as “I am because you are,” – or “we are all bound together, and my humanity depends upon your humanity.” In other words – our human bound is our greatest gift to each other. We are because each one of us is. We are all made in God’s holy image – *imago dei*. Our bound is invisible to the human eye, but it is the incredible oneness of the whole human race that allows us – inspires us – to share ourselves and care for each other with genuine love and openness.

Jesus lived and taught this same sense of oneness and equality of all people. Jesus’ inclusivity was radical in the first century, and, while difficult to imagine, can even be considered radical in the 21st century, most especially in Western, individualistic culture and worldview.

Jesus – and then Paul – and then their disciples taught that we are all different and bring different skill sets, gifts and talents – but that we are all equal in the eyes of God. When we are reminded of these teachings and ways of living, we are inspired to walk together hand-in-hand through each day and through all our lives – for this is how we best live out what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ – in community with one another – recognizing and acknowledging that we are because each one of us is – we cannot be fully human without everyone being fully human – we cannot be whole until everyone is whole. It takes a village – and we are each other’s villages. Thanks be to God!

Ephesians 4:16 - From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

*Holy God, as we enter into this new day, bless us with your reminder that we are all your children – each one of us cherished by you and each one of us called to cherish each other. Help us to help each other today – wherever our help*

*might be needed. Inspire us to call, text, email, and write those who might need to hear a kind voice today; inspire us to reach out to those standing on the street corners and those in need of safety and shelter today; reveal to us where we are needed by our fellow human beings today; teach us to break down walls and build bridges instead – one human being to the other through conversation, care, and compassion. And in all these ways, may we be the ones who build up the whole body of Christ – not alone – but together in community because we recognize that we are because each one of us is, and in these ways learn again to walk hand-in-hand just as you walk hand-in-hand with us all. In Christ’s name we pray together saying, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. (Psalm 42:1-2)

Be still and aware of God’s presence within and all around.

*In the darkness of the evening  
the eyes of our hearts are awake to you.  
In the quiet of the night  
we long to hear again intimations of your love.  
In the sufferings of the world  
and the struggles of our lives  
we seek your graces of healing.  
At the heart of the brokenness around us  
and in the hidden depths of our own souls  
we seek your touch of healing, O God,  
for there you reside.  
In the hidden depths of love, O God,  
there you reside.*

(J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Benediction*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 56).

*O Holy God, you are present with us in our coming and our going;  
you are present with us in our knowing and our seeking;  
you are present with us in our joys and our sorrows;  
you are present with us, day in and day out;  
night and day; day and night.  
Remind us even now of your holy presence  
as we settle into our evening  
and begin to take our rest.  
May your presence bring us peace,  
calm, serenity, joy, and hope.  
And, when the sun rises,  
may we awaken refreshed  
and ready to serve you for yet another day.  
In Christ’s name we pray together saying, Amen.*

**FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope - Nearing the "promised land" ...

Remember the word that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, "The Lord your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land." (Joshua 1:13)

At the end of one's journey, we need to rest our wearied bodies, souls, and minds. We need to take time to reflect on where we've been, what the journey has taught us, and where we might turn the corner and go from this place. This will be tomorrow – for tomorrow we will complete this journey from Lament to Hope as the church (the people of God).

Today we look forward to crossing into the "promised land" of Hope ... it is right there across the Jordan River. We can see it; we can taste it; and even feel it in the wind on our faces.

Lament to Hope – we've looked at what comes before Lament – what falls in-between Lament and Hope – and what follows Hope ... it's been a good and necessary journey for us all.

We look forward with twinkles in our eyes to setting our feet on the next steps of the journey God will lay before us. For today ... we give thanks to God for this journey.

*Holy God, you've been faithful to us throughout this journey of Lament to Hope – some days hard and others a bit softer on our souls – each one necessary in our journeys, and we give you thanks and praise. Thank you for this new day you've blessed us with for service to you. Open our eyes to see where you desire for us to serve; open our ears to hear you whispering where to go and who to care for; open our hearts to all those in need of hearing of your faithful and abiding love.*

*In Christ's name we pray together saying, Amen.*

**Evening blessings ...**

When I look at the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars that you have made; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, children of the earth that you care for them? Yet you have created us a little lower than the angels, and crowned us with glory and honor. (Psalm 8:3-5)

Be still and aware of God's presences within and all around;  
be still ...  
be still ...

*Holy God ...  
renew us this night in the image of your amazing love;  
renew us this night in the likeness of your gracious mercy;  
renew us,  
refresh us,  
restore us,  
we pray in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**SATURDAY, APRIL 3, 2021****Morning blessings ...**

Lament to Hope - the journey of the church (the people of God) – What have we learned about ourselves, the ways we express lament, the ways we circle around one another in times of lament – truly who we are as the people of God?

To summarize our journey ...

- lament is an experience – usually one that is jarring to our sense of well-being – precipitates lament;
- lament includes many emotions – fear, grief, loneliness, sadness, anger;
- lament comes from the deepest places of our souls;
- lament can feel very lonely – including our sense of the presence of God;
- beyond lament we can experience hope again ...
- to do so, we need the company – the accompaniment of another or others to help us to begin the journey towards the light of God – towards hope – towards joy again;
- comfort – of another – of others – sits in-between lament and hope;
- confession for all we've done and all we've left undone can be an expression of lament;
- forgiveness can also be an expression of lament;
- Jesus stands in the gap between lament and hope for each of us;
- Jesus goes before showing us the way;
- Jesus walks with us hand-in-hand;
- the hands of Jesus come to us through the gentle touch of caring people of God,
- and they help to guide us towards the light of God along the pathway towards hope;
- prayers to God – help, thanks, wow – come –in-between, and follow lament;
- faith – hope – trust – all come in-between lament and hope – and carry forward into the beyond – into the rest of our lives;
- the leap from lament to hope is a giant one – so God provides stepping stones along our journeys – stepping stones of – consolation, accompaniment, comfort, empathic listening hearts, the beginning of healing, realization of being God's beloved child, and gratitude.

And – when hope comes – when healing comes – when joy resurfaces ... ice cream is a lovely treat to self! Thanks for journeying with me through lament to hope - today, I invite you to join me in some ice cream!

*Praise be to God for journeys of lament to hope!*

*Praise be to God for journeys of life and faith!*

*Praise be to God for journeys with God!*

*Praise be to God!*

**Evening blessings ...**

Deep breath, deep breath again, and two more ...

Let us settle into the grace of our Lord and Savior – let us settle into Christ's redeeming grace.

*Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer God, you've held us with gentleness throughout the day, you've guided and directed our footsteps, our words, our actions, our hands, and we give you thanks and praise.*

*Now as the evening comes to visit and stay awhile, hold us gently again and bless us with peacefulness and rest, so that when the morning arrives in all its glory and in all glory and honor to you, we will feel renewed with your energy, imagination, intelligence, and love and will follow wherever you choose to lead us into your service.*

*In Christ's abiding love we pray together saying, Amen.*

## EASTER MORNING BLESSINGS!

Lament to Hope – The finished journey!  
We are at home! We are at peace!  
Praise be to God for Resurrection Hope!

But now you have arrived at your destination:  
by faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God.  
Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start.  
Your baptism also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe –  
Christ's life, the fulfillment of God's original promise.  
(Galatians 3:25-27 / The Message Bible)

There was no way to know the loss that we would encounter on this particular journey through lament in search of hope ...  
no way ...  
for me - the loss of the sister I'd known since I was nine -  
for you – the loss of a daughter, mother, son, father, sister, brother, too;  
for me - the loss of a friend and mentor -  
for you – the loss of someone you dearly loved, too;  
for me - the loss of the sister who was more than a sister as our souls touched –  
for you – the loss of a spiritual sister or brother, too;  
for me – the loss of precious days and nights – time – with my family –  
for you – perhaps the very same;  
for us all – the loss of an iconic, passionate leader for justice, equality, and equity.

There was no way to know that this would be such a summer of loss and that we would need this journey of lament to hope together.

There was no way to know,  
and so we set out to explore the meanings, emotions, and insights that awaited us.

What we discovered along the way were our own personal experiences of loss and a pathway towards hope and joy that we were not walking alone – for each one of us accompanied another.

Now, today – we are turning the corner towards the light of God – the hope and joy that have awaited us.

Let us rest here for a while ...

My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.  
(Exodus 33:14)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;  
The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures,  
and leads me beside still waters;  
The Lord restores my soul.  
and leads me in paths of righteousness  
for the sake of the Lord's name. (Psalm 23:1-3)

And, then, when you are ready -  
let us turn this corner together, hand-in-hand;  
let us walk on knowing we are never alone.

Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9).

Lament to Hope to Joy – together;  
Praise be to God!  
Amen.

### Evening blessings ...

*This night and all your nights –  
may God bless and keep you;  
and be gracious to you;  
may God lift up your face  
look into your soul  
and grant you peace,  
faith, hope, and love –  
this night –  
tomorrow –  
and all your nights and days.*

*In Christ's holy name we prayer together saying, Amen.*





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