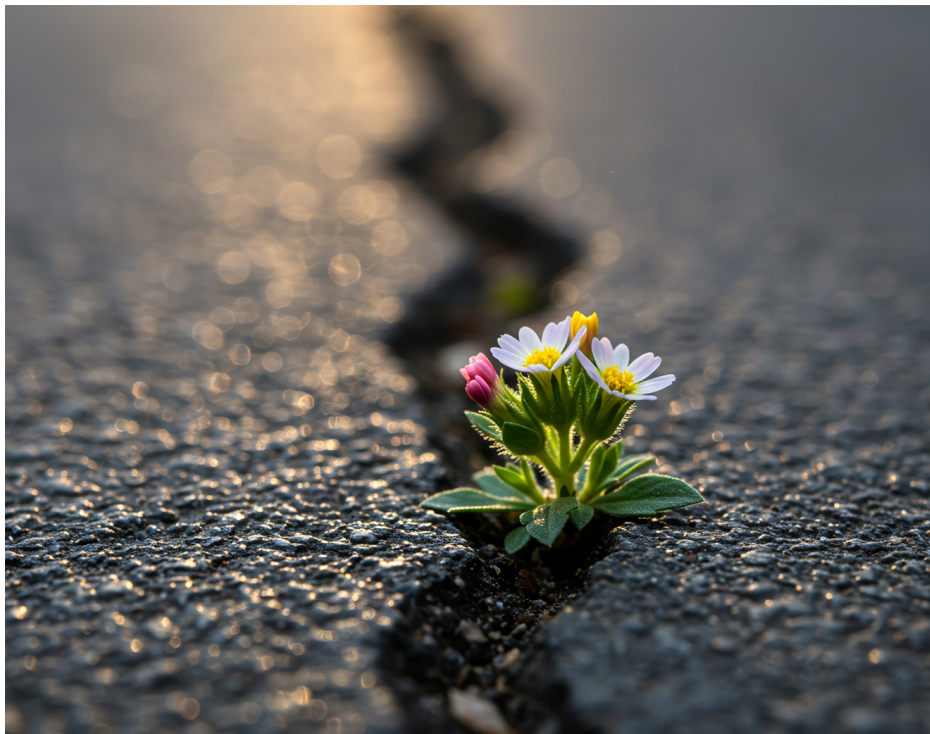


Living Well Through Lent 2026



*Cultivating Healing and Wholeness
in Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

⊕ LIVING COMPASS

We wish to express deep gratitude to our friends Ab and Nancy Nicholas and the Nicholas Family Foundation. While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to make this resource possible.



Outfitting individuals, families, congregations, and communities with tools and training to navigate life with awareness and intention.

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- Access all past daily reflections.
- Download our Lent Facilitator Guide as a free PDF file.
- Listen to the Living Compass podcast, which features two six-minute episodes per week during Lent that focus on *Cultivating Healing and Wholeness*. Find on our website or by searching for “Living Compass” on any podcast app.
- Find all of these resources and more on our website: livingcompass.org
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About the Writers

Robbin Brent is the director of publications and resource development for Living Compass, a writer, spiritual director, and founder of Wisdom Way of Knowing. She leads spiritual retreats and programs, facilitates gatherings of contemplative leaders, and is a graduate of Shalem Institute's Transforming Community and Spiritual Guidance programs. She loves spending time with her family, traveling to familiar and new places, hiking and running, and sharing early morning coffee with Rich while enjoying the wildlife that graces her yard.

Brian Lee Cole has served as the fifth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee since 2017, accompanying 45 parishes and worshipping communities. A Missouri native with deep connections to Appalachian culture, he previously served parishes in North Carolina and Kentucky. The son of an English teacher, Brian cherishes his early morning poetry readings, writing, and contemplative silence. His passion for literature, jazz, and hiking provides a wellspring of inspiration for his ministry and teaching work. He shares his life with his wife Susan, a yoga instructor, and their dog, Jerry Lee.

Rob Hirschfeld is the tenth Bishop of New Hampshire. When not making the rounds to the congregations of the Granite State, he has been working to reestablish in his life a daily practice of contemplative prayer. Sculling in a single shell on the Merrimack River has been an aid to that practice. He also enjoys making abstract art in mixed media and writing poetry in a local workshop of fellow poets. He enjoys quiet evenings at home with his beloved wife of 35 years, Polly Ingraham, a writer and career counselor at a local public high school.

Westina Matthews is an author, guest lecturer, spiritual director, and retreat leader who has discovered creative ways to connect with others through her books, essays, lectures, and teaching. For twelve years, she was an adjunct professor at The General Theological Seminary in the Center for Christian Spirituality where she taught contemplative spiritual direction. She is a mentor for The Leader's Way at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale (BDS); offers spiritual direction at both BDS and Virginia Theological Seminary; and is chair of Spiritual Directors International (5,500 members worldwide). Her most recent books are

Soul Food: Nourishing Essays on Contemplative Living and Leadership; This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church; and Dancing from the Inside Out.

Amy Sander Montanez is a therapist, spiritual director, coach, retreat leader, and writer in Columbia, South Carolina. She specializes in working with clergy and seminarians and is known for her compassionate presence with couples and individuals. The author of three books and a six-time Polly Bond Award winner for spiritual writing, Amy also teaches in the Spiritual Direction program at the Lutheran Southern Theological Seminary. Hearth-making is her greatest joy—gathering friends, cooking, dancing, gardening, and cherishing life with her husband, Nick. She stays closely connected to her daughter, Maria, through the gift of technology.

Lisa Senuta is an Episcopal Priest serving in the diocese of Kansas as director of Spiritual Formation and Clergy Care. Trained through Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington DC, her vocation focuses on spiritual guidance and faith development. Her deepest pleasure is found in relationships new and old. And she loves gardening, hiking and poetry where there is no end to discovering God's joy.

Br. David Steindl-Rast, known around the world as “The Grandfather of Gratitude,” is a Benedictine monk and the pioneer of interfaith dialogue. He worked intimately with other great spiritual teachers like His Holiness The Dalai Lama, Thomas Merton, Thích Nhất Hạnh, and Thomas Keating. Gratefulness, he discovered, is the common thread in all religions. The author of more than a dozen books, including *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer* and *You Are Here*, Br. David has taught about the grateful life for more than 50 years. (Learn more at www.grateful.org)

Scott Stoner—founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative (2008)—has served his community for more than 40 years as an Episcopal priest, retreat leader, psychotherapist, wellness coach, and author. In addition to his coaching and pastoral counseling work, he leads wellness retreats for organizations and leadership teams. He is the host of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness podcast. Scott has been married to Holly Hughes Stoner for just shy of 50 years and together they are the co-creators of the Wellness Compass Initiative and co-hosts of the Wellness Compass podcast. In his free time, Scott loves cycling, running, and soccer, and being Pops with his grandsons.

Introduction

During many Ash Wednesday services, the Officiant will invite the participants to “the observance of a holy Lent.” Given that the words *holy*, *whole*, *health*, and *healing* all share a common root, this invitation aligns beautifully with our theme of *Healing and Wholeness* this year. The season of Lent is an ideal time to focus on healing and wholeness—for ourselves and for the world.

We are delighted that you have chosen to use this devotional as a companion for this holy season. And we are honored to include the voices and deep reflections on *Healing and Wholeness* from seven featured writers.

Each Monday introduces a weekly theme related to this year’s focus on healing and wholeness. The weekly themes begin with biblical stories of healing and move through various dimensions of healing: emotional, spiritual, relational, and physical. Week Five focuses on how we are called to be instruments of healing and wholeness in the world. Holy Week then invites us to stay present in heart, soul, strength, and mind as we journey from Palm Sunday through Easter.

As important as are the daily readings, the personal reflections and insights that emerge in response to the readings are what matters most. We encourage you to record them, either in the spaces provided, or in a separate journal. When possible, talk with others or join a group where you can discuss your thoughts.

During Lent, we will be offering two audio enhancements to our booklet. Our new Living Compass app contains several guided meditations for Advent based on our theme. You can download the mobile app in the Apple or Google app stores, and you can access it from any browser at app.LivingCompass.org. I will also be releasing two six-minute episodes each week on the Living Compass Spirituality and Wellness podcast to expand on the theme of *Healing and Wholeness*. You can listen at “LivingCompass.org/podcast” or in your favorite podcast app. You also will have the opportunity to receive the reflections from this devotional in a daily email. Visit us at LivingCompass.org/Lent to learn more or to sign up.



I want to thank Robbin Brent for the companion Facilitator Guide (available as a free downloadable PDF), and for the inspiring collection of Bible verses, quotes, prayers, spiritual practices, and healing stories that she once again included in the back. Refer to them regularly to deepen and enrich your Lenten practice. I also want to thank Robbin for writing the Wednesday and Friday reflections for weeks one through five, and all of the reflections for Holy Week. Finally, I extend a deep expression of gratitude to Carolyn Karl for all she does to oversee the production and wide distribution of this resource.

It has been a joy to write the daily reflections for this devotional, inspired by our guest writers. We at Living Compass are grateful and honored to accompany you on the journey through Lent toward Easter.

And may we all now joyfully accept the invitation to the observance of a holy Lent.

Scott Stoner

Director, Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative

Living Compass—working with The Rev. Pedro Lopez and Estela Lopez from the Episcopal Diocese of Texas—has also published: *Vivir una buena Cuaresma en el 2026: Cultivando la sanación y plenitud en el corazón, alma, fuerzas y mente*—a **Spanish Lent guide** with completely original content by featured writers El Revdo. Pedro Lopez, Estela Lopez, and others. To learn more or to order, contact us: info@livingcompass.org.



The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

The Living Compass Model for Well-Being offers us guidance in four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. Just like a mobile or kinetic art, these dimensions are interconnected.



Whatever impacts one area of our lives (positively or negatively) will have an impact on the other areas. Each of the four compass points focuses on two areas of well-being, and each of the eight areas helps to guide and equip us as we commit to being more intentional about the way we live our lives. The purpose of this Compass is to provide a dynamic resource that will assist us in our search for balance and wellness. The invitation is to live an undivided life, where heart, soul, strength, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*.

Areas of Wellness

Heart

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy connections with others.
- **Emotions.** The capacity to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy manner.



Soul

- **Spirituality.** The development and practice of a strong personal faith and meaningful purpose.
- **Rest and Play.** The balance between work and renewal through rest and recreation.

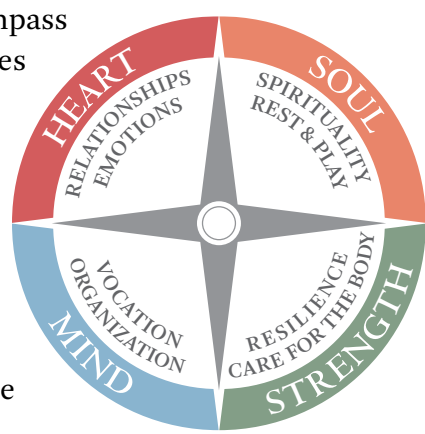
Strength

- **Care for the Body.** Cultivating healthy habits and practices for our physical well-being.
- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with life's adversities.

Mind

- **Organization.** Effective management of belongings, finances, and time.
- **Vocation.** Making the most of employment, education, and volunteering opportunities.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of faith and wellness is what makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we choose to make faith the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that *health*, *healing*, *wholeness*, and *holy* all come from the same root word *hal* or *haelen*.



The Living Compass

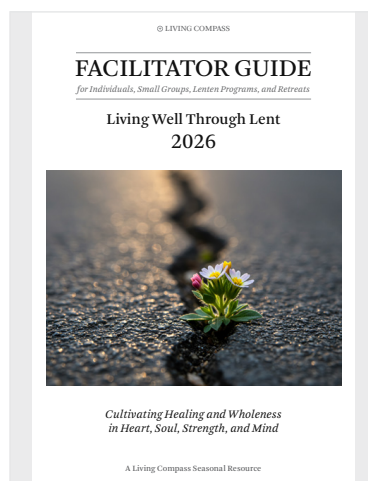
Ways to Use Living Well Through Lent 2026

This guide can be used in several ways:

- For personal reflection.
- In groups who want to gather to discuss the daily reflections.
- As a congregational resource during Lent.
- For half- or full-day Lenten retreats, where participants can use the daily readings, practices, and other resources as starting points for deeper reflection.

We've created a Facilitator Guide to provide support and guidance for leading discussions and retreats (free downloadable PDF at LivingCompass.org).

The season of Lent invites us to cultivate healing and wholeness in our lives, creating space for God's transformative work within us. As you embark on this journey, we encourage you to approach the devotional with an open heart and mind. However you use this guide, may it support you in practicing your faith in ways that are deeply renewing.



The Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Lent 2026

Lent Year A	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
Ash Wednesday February 18, 2026	Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 OR Isaiah 58:1-12	Psalm 51:1-17	2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10	Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21
First Sunday in Lent February 22, 2026	Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7	Psalm 32	Romans 5:12-19	Matthew 4:1-11
Second Sunday in Lent March 1, 2026	Genesis 12:1-4a	Psalm 121	Romans 4:1-5, 13-17	John 3:1-17 OR Matthew 17:1-9
Third Sunday in Lent March 8, 2026	Exodus 17:1-7	Psalm 95	Romans 5:1-1	John 4:5-42
Fourth Sunday in Lent March 15, 2026	1 Samuel 16:1-13	Psalm 23	Ephesians 5:8-14	John 9:1-41
Fifth Sunday in Lent March 22, 2026	Ezekiel 37:1-14	Psalm 130	Romans 8:6-11	John 11:1-45
Palm Sunday March 29, 2026		Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29		Matthew 21:1-11

Holy Week Year A	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
Monday of Holy Week March 30, 2026	Isaiah 42:1-9	Psalm 36:5-11	Hebrews 9:11-15	John 12:1-11
Tuesday of Holy Week March 31, 2026	Isaiah 49:1-7	Psalm 71:1-14	1 Corinthians 1:18-31	John 12:20-36
Wednesday of Holy Week April 1, 2026	Isaiah 50:4-9a	Psalm 70	Hebrews 12:1-3	John 13:21-32
Maundy Thursday April 2, 2026	Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14	Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19	1 Corinthians 11:23-26	John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Good Friday April 3, 2026	Isaiah 52:13-53:12	Psalm 22	Hebrews 10:16-25 OR Hebrews 4:14- 16; 5:7-9	John 18:1-19:42
Holy Saturday April 4, 2026	Job 14:1-14 OR Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24	Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16	1 Peter 4:1-8	Matthew 27:57-66 OR John 19:38-42
Easter Sunday April 5, 2026	Acts 10:34-43 OR Jeremiah 31:1-6	Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24	Colossians 3:1-4 OR Acts 10:34-43	John 20:1-18 OR Matthew 28:1-10

Ash Wednesday

February 18, 2026

From Fire to Ashes to Life

Scott Stoner

*For those who want to save their life will lose it, and
those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

—Matthew 16:25

Living in Wisconsin, I love the warmth of a fire on a winter night. Part of the delight lies in the ritual involved in building and starting the fire. The anticipation begins as I crinkle up the paper and then place the wood, working from the tiniest twigs to the larger logs. The moment of the first spark and watching the fire catch is magical. A deep feeling of peace emerges as I settle in to watch and tend the fire for the next few hours. There is a final peace, too, in watching the last embers die out.

The next morning always brings a different ritual: cleaning out the ashes. I used to resent this messy work and would do it as quickly as possible, often causing the ashes to blow in all directions as I tried to shovel and sweep them into the ash bucket. Now, however, I approach this work as slowly as possible, mindfully placing each shovelful of ashes with the least possible disturbance. As I do this, I think back to the previous evening, giving thanks for the fire and the wood from the tree that produced these ashes and, in the process, provided welcome warmth and peace.

Ashes, like the cross, are at first glance symbols of death. And yet, as we travel through this Lenten season, focusing on healing and wholeness, we will find that God has a miraculous way of transforming the symbols of the cross and ashes into life. Remembering that we are dust on Ash Wednesday is not a message of sadness, but one of humility. It reminds us of our mortality and the impermanence of our earthly bodies. What is eternal is God's life-giving love.

The source of all life is not our own effort, but God's life-giving Spirit. In God's economy, the mark of ashes in the form of a cross becomes a symbol of life. The paradox is that as we more deeply acknowledge our

Thursday, February 19, 2026

Creating Space

Scott Stoner

*Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way
lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.*

—Jeremiah 16:6

Yesterday I wrote about building fires and cleaning ashes. Today I'd like to reflect on another detail from my fire-building ritual that might help us prepare for our Lenten focus on healing and wholeness.

Our fireplace has a heavy metal grate essential for creating good fires. The grate sits on legs creating a three-inch space underneath. Paper to start the fire is placed in this space and ignites the wood above. As the fire burns, ashes from the burned wood fall into this space originally occupied by paper. A long fire will eventually fill this space completely.

These accumulated ashes must be cleaned out before each new fire as skipping this step prevents oxygen from circulating, resulting in minimal, short-lived fires.

What if we think of this as a Lenten metaphor? Our making intentional choices now to create space for the Holy Spirit's oxygen to circulate in our lives will significantly impact how fully we will be able to enter Lent's depths. We can create space through traditional Lenten practices, like reading Scripture, praying daily, walking meditations, participating in small groups, practicing gratitude, serving others, and actively engaging in a faith community. We can also create space by giving up things that tend to distract us.

However we're moved to create space, doing so at Lent's beginning will greatly enrich our journey.

Making It Personal: Is there a practice you want to take on for Lent? Is there something you want to give up to make space for your soul to grow?



Friday February 20, 2026

Whole-Person Health

Scott Stoner

Jesus never healed anyone without first seeing them as a whole person—body, mind, and spirit interconnected.

—Henri Nouwen

Modern healthcare often compartmentalizes our well-being—medical providers for physical health, therapists for emotional health, and pastors for spiritual health. While at times beneficial, this approach lacks integration.

Throughout history, health was understood holistically. For people of faith, it often remains so. When Jesus encountered those seeking healing, he saw the whole person—body, mind, spirit, and community. His healing restored not just physical function but social belonging, spiritual connection, and human dignity.

The pandemic revealed how interconnected our health truly is. COVID created profound physical suffering, isolation that challenged mental and relational health, and spiritual disconnection when we couldn't gather in community. Recovering from the pandemic has required us to address all aspects of health.

This Lent, we embrace Jesus's whole-person model of healing. Together we'll deepen our understanding of complete wholeness—physical, spiritual, emotional, relational, and social. We'll discover these aspects aren't separate compartments, but profoundly interconnected parts of our God-given humanity.

As we prepare our hearts this season, we open ourselves to the integrative healing Christ offers—restoration that touches every part of who we are.

Making It Personal: Have you personally experienced the compartmentalization of health care that we talk about in this reflection? If so, how has that affected you? What do you think of the idea that Jesus “saw the whole person”?

Saturday, February 21, 2026

The Living Compass Model for Well-being

Scott Stoner

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind.

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

Our Living Compass Model for Well-being, presented in the introductory material, offers an integrative Christian understanding of holistic health.

Imagine a mobile hanging from the ceiling. If you take hold of one part and shake it, what happens to the others? They move too. Similarly, when we face a health challenge in one dimension of our lives, it often radiates outward, affecting other areas. It is also true that when we experience healing in one area of our well-being, it, too, expands into and touches all parts of our being.

Jesus invites us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, strength, and minds. Likewise, in his approach to healing, he calls us to view health and healing holistically—seeking wellness with all our hearts, souls, strength, and minds.

Making It Personal: Can you recall a time when a health challenge in one area of the compass created difficulties in other areas? Can you find examples in the Bible where you see Jesus teaching and modeling a whole-person approach to health?

First Sunday in Lent

Sunday, February 22, 2026

Do You See? Do You See?

Brian Cole

The gate of heaven is everywhere.

—Thomas Merton

A group of us is gathered on the front porch of Thomas Merton's hermitage at the Abbey of Gethsemani near Bardstown, Kentucky. From the monastery guesthouse, our small group walked in silence to the late monk's hermitage to sit and pray. For nearly an hour, we sat in straight back chairs, facing the same field that Merton saw from his writing desk.

At the conclusion of silent prayer, Brother Paul Quenon, who guided our group into the woods where Merton's hermitage is hidden, begins speaking. He is telling us stories of Thomas Merton's years as Novice Master, when he was shaping monastic life for young monks like Brother Paul. Brother Paul entered the monastery in 1958. Like so many young monks, he had read Merton's autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and been changed by it. Now, the young monk was being guided by the famous writer.

As he spoke about the essence of Merton's monastic teachings, Brother Paul also mentioned a kind of verbal tic that his Novice Master possessed. Over the course of a teaching, Merton would often pause and say, "Do you see? Do you see?"

The young monks were being taught by someone able to guide them faithfully toward a oneness with God. As he did so, Merton's question regarding sight was a kind of invitation to awareness, an opportunity to assess understanding. Brother Paul did not tell us if any young novice ever responded to Merton's ongoing question about seeing.

"Do you see? Do you see?"

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

When Jesus heals a blind man at Bethsaida, we see a gradual miracle (Mark 8:22-26). The exchange between Jesus and the blind-becoming-less-blind-becoming-full-sighted man is a loving and honest one.

In healing the man, Jesus asks him what has changed. The man is honest, letting Jesus know his sight is improved, though also noting that trees do not tend to walk about. More than an honest response, the half-seeing man is measuring the healing that has taken place and praying for more healing to emerge.

Notice that Jesus does not blame the man for his response, suggesting that if he had more faith, his sight would be perfect. Rather, Jesus touches him again. Then, with another touch, another change, more time, the man can see clearly.

The one-stop, one-fix, one-moment experience of healing, spiritual maturity, and utter transformation is something too many of us chase, often because somewhere someone has told us that is the quest. Yet, if that were the whole point, then would not Lent last for only half a day rather than a season of week upon week?

Growth toward wholeness in the real world where you and I live, where we fall and get back up, is one in which our vision is being corrected more than once. Over time, what was not clear becomes more so. What was blurry comes into focus. A loving guide asks, “Do you see?” They are prepared to receive your honest response. What has changed? What still needs attention?

The path to wholeness and healing in the spiritual life invites us to move, to look and see as we move, to keep on moving, to keep on looking. Over time, through the grace of God, we come to know the path as our path, and we begin to discern the trees from the people.

We remain on the porch for a while. The field is still there, ordinary in its stillness—the trees rooted, the light shifting a little. Our sight was not perfect; it almost never is. But we could say a bit more about what had changed, and what was still shadowed and veiled. And we could trust that Jesus would ask again, as he once asked in Bethsaida, “What do you see?”



Monday, February 23, 2026

Biblical Stories of Healing

Scott Stoner

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

—John 10:10

While our overall theme for this Lenten devotional is *Healing and Wholeness*, each Monday we will introduce a sub-theme for the week that relates to our larger focus. This week, we will focus on exploring biblical stories of healing.

Yesterday, Brian Cole reflected on Mark 8, where a blind man experiences progressive healing. After Jesus' first touch, he asks the man, "What do you see?" Based on the response (that people were indistinguishable from trees), Jesus provides additional healing.

This week, we'll ask ourselves, "What do you see?" as we examine healing stories from both Old and New Testaments. Some stories may be new to you; others familiar. Yet as yesterday's reflection showed, our ability to see evolves over time, as we encounter and re-encounter the Living Word.

Together we will discover that God's healing approach is always holistic. Sometimes a physical sight issue or other health problem is healed like in the story from yesterday; other times, God offers emotional or spiritual healing. In the story from Mark 8, it is vision that is restored, expanding the man's limited sight so he can experience and see God's love in transformative ways. God is always working to expand our vision so that we can better see and more fully understand.

Making It Personal: Do you have a favorite biblical healing story? Do you remember when and why it became meaningful to you? Have you experienced or witnessed God's healing presence firsthand?

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Jesus Heals a Bent-Over Woman

Scott Stoner

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

—Luke 13:12-13*

For eighteen years, the woman had been bent over, unable to stand straight or look up. During those eighteen years, had anyone really seen her? If we ask the “What do you see?” question introduced by Brian Cole on Sunday, we learn that what Jesus saw was a child of God who needed healing. He saw and knew that her need for healing was more important than the law that forbade healing on the Sabbath.

God’s desire for healing always prioritizes human need over human-made religious regulations. In this story, Jesus reveals that, paradoxically, even religious systems can be complicit in causing people to bend over and be unable to stand tall. Sometimes the church itself has been complicit in bending people over with shame, exclusion, and oppressive theology.

It is worth noting that Jesus called the bent-over woman forward and laid hands on her before she even asked. God’s healing isn’t always dependent on our request—sometimes divine love takes initiative, seeing our bondage even when we’ve normalized it. It’s possible that after eighteen years, this woman had stopped imagining she could stand up straight.

Making It Personal: What, if anything, is keeping you bent over right now, perhaps not necessarily physically, but emotionally or spiritually? What invitation for healing might God be offering to you right now that eventually could help you to stand upright?

* full story on p. 74



Wednesday, February 25, 2026

The Gift of Presence

Robbin Brent

*We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that
the only solution is love and that love comes with community.*

—Dorothy Day

In stories of healing, we often see Jesus reaching out to touch those who are suffering, whether it's the leper in Mark 1:40-45 or the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:25-34. These stories remind us of the healing power of a simple, caring touch and the way that Jesus' willingness to be fully present to those he encountered could bring about healing and wholeness.

Many remember with deep gratitude having experienced the healing touch of love in moments of brokenness. It is a grace when we are with someone who can be truly present with us and, instead of jumping in with unhelpful advice, solutions, or judgment, they simply offer a place for us to be seen, offering us care and acceptance.

When we allow ourselves to be seen and touched in our woundedness—whether through faith and desperation like the woman who reached for Jesus' garment, or in moments of deep connection and vulnerability—we open ourselves to the possibility of new life.

As we walk with Jesus through the stories of his healing ministry, and as we journey through this first week in Lent, we can offer a healing touch of comfort and reassurance, and be present with others in their woundedness with tenderness and compassion, just as we allow ourselves to be touched by the healing hand of God, trusting that God's healing love is at work in us and through us.

Making It Personal: How have you experienced the healing power of a kind touch and presence in your own life? How might you offer that same touch and presence to others in your circle and practice being more fully present to yourself and others this week?

Thursday, February 26, 2026

Wrestling with God

Scott Stoner

You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.

—Genesis 32:28*

Healing is oftentimes connected with forgiveness and reconciliation. Such is the case with twin brothers Jacob and Esau. In Genesis 32, Jacob finally prepares to encounter Esau after years of his own manipulation and deception, having stolen his brother's birthright and fled.

Jacob falls asleep, nervous about facing Esau in the morning. In either a dream or a direct encounter—the text is ambiguous—he wrestles with God.

The match was fierce. Jacob's hip was knocked out of joint, yet he refused to let go until he received a blessing. During the struggle, God gives him a new name, Israel, "one who struggles with God." This blessing he earns through struggle, not by theft like in the past. He eventually walks away transformed, but remains with a limp.

God's healing sometimes includes wrestling. A healthy faith honors honest struggling with things such as doubt and the divine mystery. Such sincere struggles often lead to new blessings and understanding.

Making It Personal: Have you struggled with faith or doubt while seeking healing? Have you received any blessings amid such a struggle? Is there anything you're wrestling with now? If so, are you comfortable not resolving that struggle prematurely, but seeing it as a sacred encounter rather than a lack of faith?

* full story on p. 71



Friday, February 27, 2026

Keep Imagining

Robbin Brent

The word faith is often understood as accepting something you can't understand. People often say: "Such and such can't be explained, you simply have to believe it." However, when Jesus talks about faith, he means first of all to trust unreservedly that you are loved, so that you can abandon every false way of obtaining love. ... It's a question here of trusting in God's love. The Greek word for faith is pistis, which means, literally, trust. Whenever Jesus says to people he has healed: "Your faith has saved you," he is saying that they have found new life because they have surrendered in complete trust to the love of God revealed in him.

—Henri Nouwen

In the many stories of healing from our tradition, we often encounter the essential role that faith plays in the healing process. Whether it's the friends who lower the paralyzed man through the roof to Jesus (Mark 2:1-12), or the centurion who believes that Jesus can heal his servant with a word (Matthew 8:5-13), these stories reveal the power of a faith that persists in the face of obstacles and doubts.

Many of us have discovered that faith is not about certainty or a lack of questions, but about the willingness to keep imagining life in a certain way, a way that is grounded in the goodness and love of God. Even when challenging circumstances seem to contradict that vision, faith encourages us to keep trusting in the deeper reality of God's healing presence.

As we continue to reflect on these stories, we can keep imagining our lives and our world through the lens of faith, trusting that God's love is always at work, even in the darkest of times.

Making It Personal: How has faith played a role in your own journey of healing? What would it look like to keep imagining your life in a way that is grounded in God's love this week?

Saturday, February 28, 2026

A Gentle and Quiet Whisper

Scott Stoner

Then Elijah was told, “Go, stand on the mountain at attention before God. God will pass by.” A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn’t to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn’t in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn’t in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.

—1 Kings 19:11-12, * *The Message* translation

In the book of 1 Kings, we read that Elijah became so overwhelmed and afraid that he asked God to take his life. This occurs right after he had triumphed over the prophets of Baal and had fled into the wilderness, fearing Queen Jezebel’s threats. Under a broom tree, he prays to God to let him die.

In the story, God intervenes through an angel and says, “Get up and eat.” Twice, the angel provides food and water. Strengthened by that nourishment, Elijah travels forty days to Mount Horeb. There, God asks, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” and then God’s presence is revealed to Elijah, not with an earthquake, wind, or fire, but with “a gentle and quiet whisper.”

God doesn’t judge Elijah for his fear and exhaustion. Instead, God provides rest, food, and a gentle presence. The fact that God appears in a gentle and quiet whisper reminds us that God’s healing voice is often quiet, and may be missed if we are expecting some grand and dramatic intervention.

Making It Personal: As we conclude our first week, we ask again what Brian Cole asked at the start of our week, “What do you see here?” What have you seen in these biblical stories of healing this week? Or in terms of this story of Elijah, what “gentle and quiet whispers have you heard?”

* full story on pp. 71-72

Second Sunday in Lent

March 1, 2026

Giving Thanks for All the Little (and Big) Things in Life

—Br. David Steindl-Rast, OSB

Every surprise is a challenge to trust in life and so to grow.

Have you ever noticed how your eyes open a bit wider when you are surprised? It is as if you had been asleep, merely day-dreaming or sleepwalking through some routine activity, and you hear your favorite tune on the radio, or look up from the puddles on the parking lot and see a rainbow, or the telephone rings and it's the voice of an old friend, and all of a sudden you're awake. Even an unwelcome surprise shakes us out of complacency and makes us come alive. We may not like it at first, but looking back, we can always recognize it as a gift. Humdrum equals deadness; surprise equals life. In fact, my favorite name for the One I worship in wonder—the only name that does not limit God—is Surprise.

Right this moment, as I remember spiritual giants I have been privileged to meet—Mother Teresa, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, His Holiness the Dalai Lama—I can still feel the life energy they radiated. But how did they come by this vitality? There is no lack of surprises in this world, but such radiant aliveness is rare. What I observed was that these people were all profoundly grateful, and then I understood the secret.

A surprise does not make us automatically alive. Aliveness is a matter of give-and-take, of response. If we allow surprise to merely baffle us, it will stun us and stunt our growth. Instead, every surprise is a challenge to trust in life and so to grow. Surprise is a seed. Gratefulness sprouts when we rise to the challenge of surprise. The great ones in the realm of Spirit are so intensely alive because they are so deeply grateful.

Gratefulness can be improved by practice. But where shall beginners begin? The obvious starting point is surprise. You will find that you can grow the seeds of gratefulness just by making room. If surprise happens when something unexpected shows up, let's not expect anything at all.



Monday, March 2, 2026

Healing and Wholeness in Heart and Soul

Scott Stoner

The great ones in the realm of Spirit are so intensely alive because they are so deeply grateful.

—Brother David Steindl-Rast

Taking a whole-person approach to healing and wholeness, we will focus on different aspects of well-being over the next three weeks. This week, we will focus on healing and wholeness as it relates to our emotional and spiritual lives. Next week, we will focus on the physical dimension of well-being, followed by a focus on healing and wholeness in relationships the week after.

In yesterday's reflection, Br. David Steindl-Rast wrote, "Humdrum equals deadness; surprise equals life." As we focus on emotional and spiritual wellness this week, humdrum is a good description of what we sometimes experience in these two dimensions of our lives. Humdrum can manifest in our lives in various ways: boredom, loss of energy, lethargy, irritability, and a general loss of zest for life. These are just a few of the warning signs that the emotional and spiritual dimensions of our lives may need our attention.

We will explore several antidotes for humdrum this week, including two that Brother David strongly recommends: surprise and gratitude. Learning to welcome surprise and cultivating gratitude are two ways we can proactively nurture our hearts and souls.

Making It Personal: We invite you to begin a focus this week on emotional and spiritual well-being by pausing to reflect on these in your own life right now. What do you notice? In what ways do you notice a sense of humdrum? And in what ways do you feel a sense of aliveness?

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

Wholehearted Living

Scott Stoner

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.

—Colossians 3:23 (NIV)

Brené Brown is a best-selling author who has talked openly about her faith, including in a sermon that she preached at the Washington National Cathedral several years ago. As we focus on emotional and spiritual wholeness, her *10 Guideposts for Wholehearted Living* are instructive. She frames these suggestions as *10 Things to Let Go Of*, and *10 Things to Cultivate*.

10 Things to Let Go Of: what people think, perfectionism, numbing and powerlessness, scarcity and fear of the dark, need for certainty, comparison, exhaustion as a status symbol, productivity as self-worth, anxiety as a lifestyle, self-doubt, and appearing cool and “always in control.”

10 Things to Cultivate: authenticity, self-compassion, a resilient spirit, gratitude and joy, intuition and trusting faith, creativity, rest and play, calm and stillness, meaningful work/service, laughter, song, and dance.

Brown’s thoughts align with the wisdom from Brother David’s reflection on surprise, wonder, and gratitude. They also align with wisdom from Scripture: “When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13); and “I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the gods I will sing praises to You” (Psalm 138:1).

Making It Personal: Reread the list of *10 Things to Let Go Of* and *10 Things to Cultivate*. Choose one from each list to focus on today and in the week ahead.



Wednesday, March 4, 2026

Cultivating Grateful Living

Robbin Brent

Joy is the happiness that does not depend on what happens. It springs from gratefulness. ... To recognize a gift as gift is the first step towards gratefulness. Since gratefulness is the key to joy we hold the key to joy, the key to what we most desire, in our own hands.

—David Steindl-Rast

A *Listening Heart*, the book this quote comes from, remains one of my favorite spiritual companions. In it, Br. David writes: “Our happiness isn’t what inspires our gratefulness; it is our gratefulness that inspires our happiness. There is nothing we face in this world that we cannot transform into a vessel for thanksgiving.”

Over time, his wisdom has remained profoundly true for me. When I’m struggling to find gratitude, I return to a practice he suggests: paying attention to my senses. Each day for a week, I focus on one sense—what I smell on Monday, what I taste on Tuesday, what I hear on Wednesday, and so on. By the weekend, I’m noticing what I “see” when I close my eyes and listen with the ears of my heart, and what I sense in my body during prayer or time in nature.

This isn’t about forcing positivity or denying difficulty. It’s about training my attention to notice the gifts that are already present—the ones I so often overlook in my hurry or distraction. A sip of morning coffee. The sound of rain. The warmth of sunlight on my face. These small noticing become doorways to gratitude, and gratitude becomes a doorway to joy.

Making It Personal: Take a moment to reflect on your own experience with gratitude. Which of your senses are you most attuned to? Which ones would you like to cultivate more awareness of? What might it be like to dedicate this week to noticing one sense each day? How might slowing down to savor sensory experiences open you to greater gratitude this week?

Thursday, March 5, 2026

Two Kinds of Surprises

Scott Stoner

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs
forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in
the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

—Isaiah 43:19

Brother David wrote about how surprises can break us out of the sometimes humdrum of life. We can cultivate surprise, wonder, gratitude, and awe by paying attention to the little signs of God’s presence all around us—things we often take for granted and overlook. A butterfly flutters by, a child laughs, a stranger helps with spilled groceries, the soothing sound of a mourning dove fills the air, the practice that was introduced yesterday, of focusing on being grateful for what we receive through each of our five senses. Cultivating a beginner’s mind can turn humdrum into wonder, and remind us that God is always “doing a new thing.”

But what about painful, unwanted surprises? A health diagnosis, job loss, or death of a loved one? Where is God amid these challenges? First, we must allow ourselves to fully acknowledge our loss, sadness, and anger—even anger at God. Lament is common in the Bible. Then we seek help through prayer, our faith community, trusted friends and family, and pastors/therapists.

We can find comfort in the Quaker saying that “Way will open,” and, “God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” Painful surprises, though unwanted, can deepen our faith and reliance on God.

Making It Personal: How might you cultivate the kind of attention that opens up your eyes to the positive surprises that God has in store for you? How might you seek support, and deepen the roots of your faith when unwanted surprises occur?



Friday, March 6, 2026

The Gift of Tears

Robbin Brent

Tears are a gift. We tend to apologize for them, but actually they are jewels in the crown of human feelings. They express what is inexpressible in words. Tears reveal our innermost wounds.

—Macrina Wiederkehr

Tears can be deeply healing. When we're carrying emotional or spiritual pain, giving ourselves permission to cry releases some of what we've been holding, opening our hearts to God's loving presence. Even Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35), and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44). His tears remind us that expressing sorrow is not weakness, but part of being fully human.

In times of pain or grief, finding a safe place to let our tears flow freely—without judgment or shame—is an act of deep kindness and self-compassion. As the Psalmist writes, “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book” (Psalm 56:8). God cherishes every tear we shed, holding us with boundless love through it all.

We often feel pressure to hold back our tears, afraid they will be seen as a sign of weakness or lack of faith. Yet, tears are a natural and necessary part of who we are. They allow us to process and release intense emotions, helping to cleanse our hearts, minds, and souls so we can make room for healing. When we give ourselves, and others, permission to cry, we open the way to deeper connection with ourselves, others, and God.

Making It Personal: When was the last time you allowed yourself to cry freely, without holding back? How might you create a safe space to welcome and honor your tears this Lent? Reflect on a time when crying brought you unexpected comfort or clarity. What did your tears reveal?

Saturday, March 7, 2026

Is Self-Care Selfish?

Scott Stoner

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.**

—Prayer of St. Francis

Christians sometimes wonder if it is self-centered to focus on their own emotional and spiritual wellness. Isn't it our call to love and serve others, not ourselves?

My thought is that if our only goal is our own well-being, that would be self-centered. However, when our goal also includes being well so that we can serve others effectively, we become instruments of healing and wholeness in our world. In that case, we are better able to fulfill our desire to love our neighbor as we better love ourselves. There is a significant difference between being self-centered and having a centered self.

The opening words of the St. Francis Prayer above are a prayer for being able to be instruments of God's peace. It can be helpful to think of this in musical terms. If our own instruments—our hearts and souls—are out of tune, it is difficult to share the gift of beautiful music with others. When I am not emotionally or spiritually well, it is difficult for me to convey well-being to others.

But if we regularly tune the instruments of our lives, we can then truly be God's instruments for spreading the peace and healing described in the Prayer of St. Francis.

Making It Personal: Have you ever wondered if self-care is selfish or if it is always better to prioritize the needs of others over your own? Looking back on this week's reflections, what thoughts or practices will continue to be helpful for you in nurturing and tuning your emotional and spiritual well-being?

*full prayer on p. 79

Third Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 8 2026

Seeing in a Fresh Way

Rob Hirschfeld

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

—John 4:15

Except when the Merrimack River in New Hampshire is frozen, I row in a single sculling shell almost every day. I row upstream a few miles, turn around, and row back downstream. It’s an activity I’ve “enjoyed” for over fifty years now. It sounds monotonous, more like chore than recreation. Sometimes I’m asked, “Isn’t it just so dull to go up and down the same body of water every day?”

I see the point. There is some tedium to this lonely sport. But then I notice that it’s always a different body of water on a river. Sometimes there’s mist. The greens of the trees, from early spring to full spring, to summer vary from day to day. Often a blue heron shows up on the riverbank. It’s not the same river each day, though it is. Either full of energy or tired, I am not the same sculler from day to day, though I am.

There’s no such leisure or recreational activity for the woman at the well. She goes back and forth in the monotonous drudgery of getting water for her household. She carries with her memories she would rather not share and just as soon forget. Her life, even her love life—if we can call it that—probably seems a chore, a series of tedious repetitions in the empty hope that something new might arise. What would it be like not to carry the weight of the tedious awareness of past traumas, past patterns, past sins with their accumulated shame?

Perhaps I am drawn to water—rivers, ponds, streams, or lakes—because they have a way of praying me, of cleansing my soul. This life-changing encounter between Jesus and the woman of Samaria *has to* take place by a well. It *has to* involve water. The well where Jesus meets her is really a kind of baptismal font where she is given a new way to see her life.



Monday, March 9, 2026

Physical Healing and Wholeness: A Holistic Approach

Scott Stoner

*Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you
may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul.*

—3 John 1:2

Eighteen years ago, I was hit by a car on my bicycle. I was knocked unconscious for several hours and ended up with multiple injuries, including a traumatic brain injury that took several years to recover from.

My physical pain was acute for quite a while, but gradually calmed down. Unbeknownst to me, but quite apparent to those closest to me, six months after my accident, my mental health was suffering. Like the Samaritan woman at the well that Rob Hirschfeld wrote about yesterday, the trauma I was carrying was weighing me down and becoming visible to those closest to me. With the support of family, friends, and my faith community—who spoke the truth with love to me—I was able to get help and recover.

I learned a valuable lesson in my recovery. I, like everyone, am wonderfully created by God as a whole—body, mind, heart, and spirit—meaning that physical well-being is interconnected with all aspects of well-being. This is our theme for this week as we explore how our physical well-being both affects and is affected by our spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions of wellness.

Making It Personal: Bring to mind a time when your physical health either affected or was affected by your emotional, spiritual, and relational health. Pause and reflect on what you might learn from this experience.

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

God Loves Every Body

Scott Stoner

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ... Therefore glorify God in your body.

—1 Corinthians 6:19, 20

At Living Compass, we often say that many compasses are competing to guide our lives. The compasses of the dominant culture are strong, frequently giving us messages that are contradictory to those that our faith gives to us. This seems to be especially true in the messages we receive about our bodies.

Social media and consumer-driven ads often show us body images that are perfectionist, unrealistic, and are frequently obsessed with looking young. The message is clear: your body is not okay as it is, and you need our product/program/workout to create a body you can feel good about. Sadly, sometimes churches have even added to body negatively by falsely attributing sin and temptation to the body.

In contrast, a healthy faith tells us that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and that God loves every body. Our bodies are wonderfully created by a loving God who loves all aspects of who we are, no exceptions. This faith-based body-positivity celebrates our bodies and inspires us to care for the gifts that they are.

Making It Personal: Are you aware of any unhealthy body image messages you may have internalized? If so, what might help you move to a more positive image of your body, one that is grounded in the truth that your body as a miraculous gift from God?



Wednesday, March 11, 2026

The Loving Truth: Listening to the Body

Robbin Brent

Your body is talking. Are you listening?

—Dr. Neha Sangwan

I'd been an avid runner for most of my life before a neck injury brought it to a painful halt in early winter 2001. The next three years were a dark night of my body, mind, and soul. I could not sleep, drive a car, or carry anything over a couple of pounds. I lost trust in my body's ability to heal and be well.

Fast forward to early March 2025. I was inspired to run again, thrilled by the feeling of wild exhilaration and freedom as my strength and stamina returned. It had been almost 25 years since I'd moved this way, and I was impatient, pushing myself too hard.

My body began talking to me, quietly at first: a tenderness here, tightness there, then pain settled in. When I ignored those early "whispers," it tried a little louder to get my attention. Finally, it got so painful I was forced to come to ground and listen to the loving truth: this body is not the same body it once was.

As we grow older, most of us wrestle with accepting and loving what is true about our bodies. We may need to grieve what we've lost before we can honor, embrace, and celebrate the amazing gift we inhabit. As we tune in to our bodies' wisdom, we can learn to see them as holy temples, places where God's Spirit dwells.

When we honor the intuitive intelligence of our bodies, we treat them with the same tenderness and reverence Jesus showed to those he touched and healed. As we navigate the inevitable highs and lows, we can practice kindness, patience, and grace, trusting the wisdom of our bodies and the One who made them.

Making It Personal: How might you practice greater reverence and care for your body? What is your body telling you right now about what it needs? What would it look like to honor your physical well-being as a gift from God?

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Healing, Cure, and Wholeness

Scott Stoner

Prayer doesn't always change outcomes, but it always changes us.

There is a beautiful prayer in the Ministry to the Sick portion of the Book of Common Prayer:

This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen (BCP, p. 461).

I have prayed this prayer with many people who were suffering, including some who knew that they were dying. I prayed it myself during my bike accident that I wrote about last Monday. It reminds us that no matter our circumstances we can live in the spirit of Jesus, and that even in times of trial, we can still pray for and experience spiritual and emotional healing.

It is good and natural to pray for cures and miracles, for strength and courage. And it is good to remember that while prayer doesn't always change outcomes, it always changes us.

Making It Personal: How does the idea that “prayer doesn't always change outcomes, but it always changes us” connect with your experience? Consider praying the prayer above for a few days and reflect on what effect it has on you.



Friday, March 13, 2026

Making Space for Rest

Robbin Brent

When you slowly begin to believe and understand your inherent worth, rest becomes possible in many ways.

—Tricia Hersey

In our near-constant busyness and the many demands we navigate every day, it can be easy to overlook rest and our need for regular periods of stillness and renewal. When we're overcommitted and scrambling to squeeze another tiny ounce of time and energy out of the day, rest feels like a luxury, or even a sign of weakness, especially in a culture that prizes productivity and achievement.

Yet busyness isn't always about an overscheduled calendar—sometimes our minds are the busiest part of us. When worry or repetitive thoughts spin through the same concerns over and over again, our minds and souls desperately need rest, even when our bodies are not in motion.

My own struggles with this have taught me that rest is not optional, but essential—a vital component of wellness and wholeness. When we find ways to step away from our congested schedules and quiet our racing thoughts, we create more space to simply be, making room for our bodies, minds, and souls to regenerate and heal.

This week, as we reflect on the theme of physical healing, we can discover and practice ways to prioritize rest, honor the natural rhythms of our bodies, and trust in the restorative powers of stillness and renewal. As we learn to incorporate more intentional periods of rest into our daily routines, we are better able to cultivate a deeper sense of balance and well-being in all areas of our lives.

Making It Personal: When was the last time you allowed yourself to rest deeply, without guilt or distraction? How might you create more space for rest and renewal in your life—whether from an overcrowded schedule or from worry or repetitive thoughts? Reflect on a time when rest played an important role in your physical or emotional healing. What insights did you gain from that experience?

Saturday, March 14, 2026

We All Take Turns on the Mat

Scott Stoner

Then some people came bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.

—Mark 2:3,4

When we read the story where Jesus heals a man lowered through the roof of a house on a mat (Mark 2:1-12), we learn an essential truth about Christian community: we all will take turns on the mat.

In every life, to everything there is a season. When our physical, emotional, and spiritual strength is strong, we can be like one of the four friends doing the carrying of the paralyzed man on the mat. Metaphorically, we can climb rooftops, and do whatever it takes to help a friend. At such times we can live out Jesus' call to bear one another's burdens.

But eventually, life humbles us all. Hard things happen to good people. It may happen when illness strikes. Or when we are overwhelmed by grief. Or when depression or anxiety paralyzes us. There are many ways we can become immobilized. In these seasons of vulnerability we discover the power of our faith and the power of community and that it is not weakness, but wisdom, the wisdom to acknowledge our need to be carried.

The question isn't whether we will need the mat and the support of others at some point, but whether we will have the courage and humility to ask for the help we need.

Making It Personal: How comfortable are you asking for help when you are in need? And is there someone in need that you feel called to embody the healing power of Christ, and to offer Christian community to right now?

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 15, 2026

What Is, Just As It Is

Lisa Senuta

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

—John 9:32-33

Like dominos when Jesus healed the man born blind, that act of mercy set in motion a long chain of reactions. The brilliance of the passage is in how it can help us recognize how disconnected we can be from what is.

The blind man sees clearer than anyone the absolute miracle of meeting Jesus and of healing. His response is simple: awe and wonder. How? Why? It does not matter. *If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.*

What is just as it is,* guides us toward the heart of the matter. Whereas our opinions, our questions, our judgements often disguise reality and therefore the miracle at the center of being alive.

This is comically illuminated in a cartoon Ronald Rolheiser describes in his book, *The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God*. The cartoon is of a family waking up in the morning. In the first frame the dad is driving his car to work and says to himself, “another dumb day, going to that same dumb office, to work on those same dumb numbers that I must have worked on a thousand times.” In the second frame the mom is cleaning the floor saying to herself, “Another dumb day cleaning this same dumb house I must have cleaned a thousand times.” In the next frame we see the older children on the school bus. One says to the other, “Another dumb day going to the same dumb school with the same dumb teachers working on the same dumb stuff we’ve been working on a thousand times before.” In the last frame we see the youngest child standing up in her crib, wide awake fresh for a new day, her arms up in the air facing the sun shouting, “Another Day!”



Monday, March 16, 2026

Healing and Wholeness in Relationships

Scott Stoner

*Marveling at life can be experienced every
day at the center of being alive.*

—Lisa Senuta

Relationships are foundational to our lives. Few things affect the well-being we experience in our lives more than the well-being of our relationships. Even so, it is easy to take our relationships for granted and overlook their importance.

This week, our focus will be on healing and wholeness in relationships. We will reflect on ways to cultivate our relationships to help them grow and thrive. We will also consider steps we can take to heal a relationship when there has been hurt.

One thought that will be helpful as we reflect on relationships is captured in Lisa Senuta’s quote above from yesterday’s reflection. When we can look at the people in our lives with appreciation and love, our relationships with others can be seen as treasures, even when they are imperfect and challenging at times. And as we will see, the more we tend to them, working on loving and forgiving as need be, the greater the blessing they will be.

Our God is a relational God who thankfully provides us with the guidance and inspiration we need to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. As Scripture says, “We love, because God first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Making It Personal: Take a moment to pause and offer gratitude for the people in your life, past and present, who are important to you. Also, pause and reflect on whether there is a particular relationship that you feel God is calling you to nurture or strengthen at this time.

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

Choosing What Clothes to Wear

Scott Stoner

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

—Colossians 3:12

One misconception about love is that love is primarily a feeling. That's what many songs and greeting cards would lead us to think. The reality, though, is that love is mainly a decision.

Feelings ebb and flow in all relationships. Sometimes we feel warmth and joy, while other times we feel hurt or irritation. A Christian approach to love transcends feelings and grounds our love in the teachings of our faith and our core values.

When we view love as a decision grounded in our understanding of Jesus' teachings, the above passage from Colossians becomes more understandable. Just as we decide what clothes to put on each day, we are called to make the decision to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. What we "wear" each day is a choice we have in our relationships, independent from the current state of our feelings. None of us does this perfectly, but we continue to be faithful to cultivating a wholehearted commitment to love, even in difficult moments.

Making It Personal: What do you think of the idea that love is primarily a decision? Is there one particular attribute in the Colossians passage that speaks to you right now? If so, how might you decide to put that into practice right now?



Wednesday, March 18, 2026

An Undefended Heart

Robbin Brent

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.

—C.S. Lewis

In the tenderness of a new love, I discovered that choosing to be undefended created a space where my heart could be completely open. I also discovered that while an undefended heart can be hurt and broken, it is also a wellspring of courage. To love this way after years of guarding my heart, I drew strength from Jesus' reassurance that loving without reservation is always a path to healing and wholeness. When lovingly tended, an unguarded heart is a heart free to give and receive so much more goodness, sweetness, generosity, and love.

By opening his heart fully to the pain and brokenness of the world, we see in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection the power of an unguarded heart. His ultimate act of surrendering to love showed us that God's healing love is at work in every dimension of our lives. We, too, in our most intimate relationships, can choose to let down our guard, to allow our hearts to be seen and known in all their beauty and brokenness.

As we journey with Jesus to the cross, can we risk loving without reservation by allowing our own hearts to be opened, knowing that it is only in this openness that we can fully give and receive the love that is our deepest response to God's ceaseless love for us?

Making It Personal: How might you embrace openness in your relationships as a path to healing and wholeness? What would it look like to risk an undefended heart, trusting in the power of love?

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Practicing Forgiveness

Scott Stoner

It's easier to forgive an enemy than to forgive a friend.

—William Blake

The people closest to us see everything—our contradictions, our shortcomings, the ways we haven't quite figured ourselves out yet. This intimacy creates a unique paradox: the very closeness that makes deep love possible also makes deep wounds possible.

Blake's observation above takes on new meaning when we think about those close to us: it's often easier to forgive a stranger than a friend or family member. Why? Maybe because we carry different expectations for those closest to us. We believe they should understand us better and treat us more carefully. When those needs go unmet, the sting lingers.

When hurt occurs within relationships, we face a choice: we can either talk it out or act it out. If we don't choose the former, we'll default to the latter. Think of friends or families who stop speaking—that silence isn't an absence of communication; it's a form of it.

Real forgiveness requires something counterintuitive: vulnerability with the very people who have the power to hurt us most. It means choosing difficult conversations over comfortable distance. Ephesians 4:15 says, "Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." The phrase *we must grow* names what forgiveness requires: the spiritual and emotional maturity to stay present when everything in us wants to retreat.

Making It Personal: Does Blake's quote ring true for you? Have you found it harder to forgive those closest to you? When hurt in a relationship, what's helped you move toward talking it out versus acting it out?



Friday, March 20, 2026

Letting Go

Robbin Brent

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last.

—Luke 23:46

As we navigate the path of emotional and spiritual healing, we will likely find ourselves confronted with the need to surrender, to let go of our illusions of control and allow ourselves to be held by a love greater than ourselves. This can be terrifying, especially when we have experienced the pain of betrayal or abandonment. Yet, surrender is not passive resignation but an active choice to align ourselves with a greater reality. Just as Jesus, with his final breath, surrendered completely into God's hands, we too can surrender ourselves to trust in a love that will hold us.

Surrendering involves a daily practice of entrusting ourselves to God's care, acknowledging our limitations, and making space for grace to work in our lives. Understood this way, true strength often looks like surrender, especially in our closest relationships.

We have reflected on forgiveness this week as one aspect of healing. To forgive often involves surrendering—surrendering our need to be right or our need to get even. It also means surrendering to God's wisdom and desires. As Henri Nouwen writes, "Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all people love poorly. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour increasingly."

Lent offers us the opportunity to practice both surrender and forgiveness, to loosen our grip on our own lives, and to allow ourselves to be held by the One who loves us beyond measure.

Making It Personal: What areas of your life feel difficult to surrender control? Is there a particular relationship that might be helped by a decision to surrender control or practice forgiveness? How might you practice letting go and allowing God to be more present in your life this week?

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Where the Grass is Always Greener

Scott Stoner

Attention is the beginning of devotion.

—Mary Oliver

Social media posts are often the highlight reels of people’s lives, and so it can be easy to envy the carefully curated lives of others. Our real lives and relationships may not feel as favorable as the ones we see online. We may end up feeling jealous as we compare the idealized outside lives of others to our own inside life. There is an old saying that captures this well: “The grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence.”

A few years ago, I heard a new version of this saying that I believe is ultimately much more helpful: “The grass is greener where we water it.” This is a masterful way of inviting us to redirect the wasteful energy of envy, to focus instead on what we can do to water growth in our own lives and in our relationships.

In all dimensions of well-being, what we pay attention to is what will grow. As any gardener knows, watering, weeding, and mulching with good nutrients create growth. The growth may take time, and it may not always be the exact growth we had planned or expected. However, with time, patience, and perseverance, new growth will appear.

Making It Personal: Pause and reflect on the influence, if any, that social media has on your relationships. What do you think of the quote, “The grass is greener where you water it?” As we conclude this week’s focus on relationships, is there a particular relationship in your life that you feel called to continue to water?

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 22, 2026

The Crooked Made Straight Again

Westina Matthews

*Please give me, Lord, a clean heart,
I wanna walk much better.*

—Margaret Pleasant Douroux

“**D**o you think you can run out of chances with God?” I asked my spiritual advisor during one of our sessions more than 30 years ago. Looking through tear-filled eyes, I anxiously awaited his response.

I had raised the question because I was recovering from a life-threatening illness, had been abandoned by my then boyfriend in the midst of my recovery, and my job was suffering. Flat on my back, my body wracked with pain, I had a lot of time to begin to think about my life as it was and how I would like it to be.

“No,” he gently reassured me. “You don’t run out of chances with God. It may take a while to ‘make the crooked straight’ again (Isaiah 45:2 KJV), but you don’t run out of chances with God.”

After 3,955 days, Tiger Woods won his fifth Masters and, at the age of 43, became the second-oldest winner of the Masters at Augusta National. After countless false starts, with personal and professional setbacks, on Sunday, April 14, 2019, Tiger Woods showed the world that he had not run out of chances. The crooked was made straight again.

Like Tiger Woods, I too, experienced plenty of false starts and wrong turns. The gospel hymn *Give Me A Clean Heart* (Psalm 51:9-12) became my personal anthem. And through prayerful listening and sacred conversations with the holy, I began creating a new covenant with God, continually affirming who I am, who I am becoming, and who I want to be.

Lent offers us an invitation to live into the belief that the crooked can be made straight again.



Monday, March 23, 2026

Extending Healing and Wholeness to All

Scott Stoner

Let us hold our broken world—and our own brokenness—in compassion, light, and love. For God’s love reigns forever, forgiveness is the key, reconciliation is the goal, and love is always, always, the answer.

—Westina Matthews

This week, we turn our attention to loving our neighbor, specifically, how we can participate in bringing healing and wholeness to the world. As people of faith, our call to wholeness always extends beyond just ourselves and those closest to us. Jesus taught that when it comes to loving our neighbor, there are no limits to whom we are called to extend our love.

The quote above from Westina Matthew’s Sunday’s reflection captures our focus for this week: to hold the brokenness of the world, along with our own, in compassion, light, and love, and to be instruments of God’s forgiveness, reconciliation, and love.

Given the overwhelming needs for healing in the world, focusing our attention on these needs can feel daunting. A story from a young man who visited Mother Teresa can be helpful to give us perspective. The young man asked her how he could return home and do something as significant as she was doing in her work in India. Mother Teresa wisely responded, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can all do small things with great love.”

Making It Personal: What “small things” are you currently doing to offer healing to others? Take a moment to pause and pray for guidance on any additional small offerings of love that God may be calling you to provide to others.

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

Who's Our Neighbor?

Scott Stoner

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'

—Matthew 5:43-44

One of the criticisms of social media is that it creates bubbles where users tend to interact with content and people who fully align with their own views. Sometimes referred to as an “echo chamber,” this often encourages an “us” and “them” mentality.

Jesus was critical of the religious people who lived in the echo chambers of their own, dividing people into “us” and “them,” and focusing only on loving and caring for those who were like them. As a way to completely turn this thinking on its head, he uttered the words above, challenging us to love everyone—even those whom we may have been led to think are our enemies. In this same portion of Scripture, Jesus goes on to ask, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?”

For Jesus, a neighbor is not limited to our family, friends, and people with whom we are comfortable interacting. A neighbor is not defined by affinity, but by need. “Othering” is a term that is sometimes used to distance and dismiss others who are different from us. For Jesus, there are no “others.” We are all neighbors, all brothers and sisters in Christ, all God’s beloved.

Making It Personal: Who do you find it challenging to love as your neighbor? Are you aware of any “echo chambers” that you participate in that might influence who you think of as a neighbor, worthy of love?



Wednesday, March 25, 2026

The Practice of Lovingkindness

Robbin Brent

May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be safe. May I live with ease.

—First prayer, for ourselves, in the Lovingkindness Prayer

It can seem daunting to love those who are not like us, who may have, in fact, caused us hurt or harm. When we encounter the scriptural call to love our neighbor, we may wonder how to move from obligation to genuine care. The Lovingkindness Prayer offers a contemplative practice for cultivating authentic compassion—first for ourselves, then for those we love, and eventually for all beings, including those we find difficult.

This ancient prayer practice helps us embody what we're called to be: people who extend God's love outward in ever-widening circles. At each stage of the practice, we offer loving wishes for well-being, peace, and freedom from suffering.

What makes this practice transformative is its gradual nature. We don't begin by forcing ourselves to love those who are challenging. Instead, we start where love flows naturally—toward ourselves and those dear to us—and slowly expand our capacity for compassion. Over time, this practice softens our hearts, trains us to notice and nurture connection, and helps us see even challenging people through the lens of shared humanity.

The Lovingkindness Prayer reminds us that God's love is always present and available, that there's no "right" way to practice, and that whatever arises—comfort or resistance, warmth or numbness—can be held and honored within God's loving embrace. As we practice extending lovingkindness, we participate in the healing work of creating a world where all beings are seen, valued, and held in love. (*See the full Lovingkindness Prayer practice on p. 84.*)

Making It Personal: Try the Lovingkindness Prayer practice this week. Notice what arises as you extend compassion to yourself, loved ones, and those you find difficult. How does this practice expand your capacity to love your neighbor?

Thursday, March 26, 2026

Social Determinants of Health

Scott Stoner

*Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights
of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

—Proverbs 31:8-9

We are well aware that the choices we make as individuals affect our health and well-being. We are also mindful that genetics also plays an essential role. In addition to these two factors, there is a third factor that we may not be as aware of: the social determinants of health.

Social determinants of health encompass larger systemic factors, including income, education, housing quality, neighborhood safety, food access, transportation, and healthcare access. These factors interact and create health disparities across populations.

Understanding this helps us expand our focus on loving our neighbor to think beyond direct service to individuals and consider how we can impact the systemic factors that contribute to poor health. Jesus calls us not only to love and serve individuals, but also to work toward creating more equitable conditions that promote health for all people. For example, when a faith-based group opens a healthcare clinic in an underserved area, it is doing both—providing care for individuals and addressing the systemic issue of providing access to quality healthcare for all.

Making It Personal: What are your thoughts about the concept of social determinants of health? Do you see a need in your community where you or your faith community could, in the words of Proverbs 31, “Speak out for those who cannot speak”?



Friday, March 27, 2026

What We Have to Offer the World

Robbin Brent

*Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard,
anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.*

—John 12:3

Six days before the Passover, an intimate and extravagant act of love takes place in the village of Bethany. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, takes a pound of pure nard, an incredibly expensive perfume, and anoints Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. It's a scene of startling intimacy as Mary pours out her most precious possession in a gesture of pure devotion.

Mary's act challenges the limits of our love. She gives without calculation, without holding back, offering her whole self in service to the One who is life itself. Her anointing of Jesus foreshadows the self-giving love that will ultimately triumph over death, bring forth new life, and make all things whole.

As we stand on the cusp of Holy Week, Mary's example speaks to a question many of us wrestle with: in a world of overwhelming need and uncertainty, what can I, one person, do that will make a difference? Mary didn't try to solve everything. She simply offered what she had—her treasure, her presence, her whole self—in that moment. Her anointing planted a seed of extravagant love that rippled outward in ways she could not have predicted or controlled. Like Mary, we can show up and be fully present in the moment: noticing where we are, who is before us, what we have to offer. This is how the world is healed—not through grand actions—but through small acts of love offered fully and without reservation. David Brooks described this beautifully: “Culture changes when a small group of creative people find a beautiful way to live and the world wants that.” We are never alone in this work of healing. Even when we cannot see the full impact of our efforts, we can trust that God does.

Making It Personal: How does Mary's act of anointing Jesus challenge or inspire you? What might it look like for you to love extravagantly this Holy Week?

Saturday, March 28, 2026

Locally Sourced Healing

Scott Stoner

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

—Matthew 25:35-36

“**L**ocally sourced food” is a health movement that focuses on eating food grown nearby, which is often pesticide-free and healthier for us. Expanding on this concept, let’s reflect today on what “locally sourced healing” might look like and examine how most congregations have a long history of providing this kind of healing.

Take a moment to reflect on the congregations in your community, including your own, if you are currently part of one. Now reread the passage from Matthew above. There is a good chance you can think of a ministry from either your own or another local congregation that is addressing many of the needs listed—providing food, welcoming strangers or those who have been marginalized, holding clothing drives and operating ministries that dispense needed supplies for those who can’t afford them, offering care for the sick, visiting people in prison. You can likely think of many additional ways in which congregations regularly provide healing and wholeness to both their members and those in the broader community.

These ministries are simply the church being the church, living out the teachings of Jesus to love our neighbor. No one congregation can do everything, but every congregation can do something.

Making It Personal: Are you currently involved in a ministry of healing and wholeness offered by a congregation? If not, is there one you might feel called to join? If you are a member of a congregation, might there be a new healing ministry that your local church is being called to start?

Palm Sunday

March 29, 2026

Look At Me

Amy Sander Montanez

Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.

—Kahlil Gibran

Scars. We all have them. Some are visible, like those on a dear friend's body. We shared a hotel room on a recent trip, and one morning she came out of the shower smiling, unconcerned with modesty. "Look at me," she said. "I am covered in scars. I see them as my survivor wounds."

Her breast cancer had cost her a breast, and the scars around that site were obvious. There were more beneath her arm from lymph node removal, and a few lower in her stomach from other surgeries. And there she stood, gazing into the mirror with joy and pride—so comfortable in her own skin.

Years ago, I worked with a woman who had survived a fiery accident in her young life. After much time in a burn center and countless surgeries, her smile was slightly crooked but her spirit strong. One day, as we explored the effects of her trauma, she suddenly lifted her shirt and cried out, "Look at me!" again and again, until the words became sobs.

I did the only thing I could; I looked at her. Then I held her as she wept. I silently prayed over her—thanking God for her life, her courage, and the trust it took to be seen. I still hope I honored that sacred moment.

Invisible scars tell stories, too—scars from emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Scars from neglect, bullying, or the loneliness of being different. Scars from betrayal, from bad decisions—our own and others'.

As a therapist and spiritual director, I believe our best chance for healing comes when we allow others to see our scars, both visible and hidden. In safe spaces, when we share the stories of our wounds and our efforts to heal, something within us softens. Acceptance grows. Our unhealed



March 30, 2026

The Courage to Behold

Robbin Brent

*The pain of the crucifixion did not begin on Good Friday.
It had been there from the beginning, from the moment
the Word became flesh. The pain was always there.*

—Henri Nouwen

As we enter Holy Week, we face the stark reality of the suffering that lies ahead for Jesus. We know the devastating pain and humiliation that await him, and yet we are powerless to alleviate his anguish, just as we are often helpless to prevent the inevitable wounds in our own lives. We are asked to bear witness, to stay present to the events unfolding before us.

Amy Montanez’s reflection yesterday, “Look at Me,” reminds us of what happens when we behold one another in our woundedness. “I believe our best chance for healing comes when we allow others to see our scars, both visible and hidden,” she writes. “When we share the stories of our wounds and our efforts to heal, something within us softens.”

In my own life, I’ve discovered that the most profound healing comes when I am able to stay present to pain—my own and others’. When we dare to see and be seen in our brokenness, the walls that separate us crumble, and we catch a glimpse of our shared humanity in the eyes of another. Perhaps, in that space of connection, we also catch a glimpse of how God beholds us—already whole and beloved, just as we are.

Making It Personal: This Holy Week, how might you practice the art of staying present—to the journey of Jesus, to others, and to your own? What is the invitation for you this week to keep your heart open as you bear witness to each moment, even the painful ones? How might you practice beholding Jesus and others in their woundedness, trusting in the healing power of being seen?

March 31, 2026

Befriending Our Hearts

Robbin Brent

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you, all things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.

—St. Teresa of Avila

As we continue to walk with Jesus through Holy Week, we can draw on the timeless wisdom of St. Teresa of Avila, a 16th-century Spanish mystic, as we compassionately tend to the wounds and fears of our own hearts. Mary Magdalene shows us what this looks like. She refuses to abandon Jesus, even as others fled. She stays present to her grief and her love. Like Mary, we too can cultivate the courage to stay present to our own hearts—honestly facing our emotions, trusting in God’s steadfast love, and patiently allowing space for healing.

In a world that often demands stoicism and self-sufficiency, Jesus models a different way. He weeps with Mary and Martha at the tomb of Lazarus. He expresses anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane. He cries out in abandonment on the cross. Jesus validates the full range of human emotion and shows us we can honor our own hearts, without judgment or shame.

Tending to our hearts doesn’t mean we’re self-absorbed or weak. It means we’re honest. It means we bring our whole selves—the broken parts, the afraid parts, the grieving parts—into the presence of the One who already knows us completely and loves us still. This Holy Week offers us the opportunity not only to witness Jesus’s journey to the cross, but also to embrace our own humanity, trusting that our hearts are safe with God, even as we walk through the valley of the shadow.

Making It Personal: What emotions are you carrying this Holy Week—grief, fear, longing, confusion, or even numbness? Can you name them honestly before God? How might you create space this week to tend to your own heart with the same compassion you would offer a dear friend? What would it look like to entrust your whole self—wounds, fears, and all—to God’s tender care?



April 1, 2026

Strength in Surrender

Robbin Brent

Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.

—Luke 22:42

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus brought his whole, honest self to God—pleading for the cup of suffering to pass him by, yet ultimately entrusting himself to God’s will.

Sometimes we equate surrender with weakness or passivity. But Jesus shows us that surrender requires immense strength—the strength to acknowledge our own limitations, to ask for help, to let go of control. Surrendering to God is not about giving up, but about entrusting ourselves to a Love that is greater than our own understanding.

Thomas Merton knew this well. “My Lord God,” he prayed, “I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.” Merton’s prayer reminds us that surrender doesn’t require certainty or understanding. It requires only our willingness to listen and respond—even, and perhaps especially, when we cannot see the path forward.

Like the disciples who fled in fear but returned to the upper room, we too can find our way back to faithfulness even after being tempted to resist or flee. We can draw on strength from our relationship with God, and from the community that journeys with us. When we feel weak and broken, we can lean into the One who knows our frailty and yet calls us beloved. In our surrender, we find we are held in the arms of God’s unending love.

Making It Personal: What burdens do you need to surrender to God this Holy Week? How might letting go be an act of strength and faithfulness? Can you think of a time when surrendering to love required great courage and strength? What would it look like to bring your whole, honest self to God this week, just as Jesus did in the Garden?

Maundy Thursday

April 2, 2026

Love to the Very End

Robbin Brent

*Having loved his own who were in the
world, he loved them to the end.*

—John 13:1

The Upper Room is the setting for this holy night as we witness Jesus' final hours with his disciples. Amidst the impending betrayal and suffering, he assumes the posture of a servant, washing his disciples' feet and sharing a meal that will become the enduring sign of his presence and love.

The Gospel of John says it simply: "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." This love remains steadfast, undiminished by what lies ahead—not weakened by the disciples' coming desertion, but somehow deepened in anticipation of it.

As Jesus breaks the bread and shares the cup, we witness the mystery of his self-giving love, the love that will lead him to the cross. In this moment, Jesus entrusts himself completely to his disciples, and to us, offering his very body and blood as nourishment for the journey ahead.

Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th-century mystic and composer, knew that "Love abounds in all things, excels from the depths to beyond the stars, is lovingly disposed to all things." This is what we see at the Last Supper—Jesus drawing near to us in our need. Just as he shared his brokenness with his disciples, he draws us to bring our wounds and fragility to the table of his love. He meets us in the depths of our betrayals and failures, offering the bread of forgiveness and the cup of healing. Mary Magdalene understood this kind of love—undignified, extravagant, uncontainable. When she anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume and wiped them with her hair, her gesture was intimate, tender, and scandalous. It was love that refused to be measured or contained by propriety.



How often we hold back parts of ourselves, fearing what others might think. We may find it easier to give than to receive, to serve than to be served. But Jesus graciously accepted Mary’s gift, just as he allowed himself to be washed, fed, and cared for throughout his ministry. As we approach the cross, let us open ourselves to the healing intimacy of Jesus’ love—a love that cherishes us in our ordinary, embodied humanity.

This Maundy Thursday, we can let our remembrance of the Last Supper draw us near to Jesus in the circle of his love. We can be nourished by the gift of his presence and be changed by his self-offering. And we can pray for the grace to love as he loved, to the very end, even as we face our own weakness and the brokenness of the world.

Making It Personal: As you reflect on the intimacy of the Last Supper, what touches your heart most deeply? How might you open yourself to receive Jesus’ self-giving love in a new way this Holy Week? What would it look like to offer love extravagantly and undignifiedly, as Mary Magdalene did? How might it change you?

Good Friday

April 3, 2026

They Stayed

Robbin Brent

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

—John 19:25

As we contemplate Jesus' suffering and death on this solemn day, the faithful women who remained with him to the end stand as powerful witnesses. The Gospel of John tells us that Mary, his mother, Mary Magdalene, and other women stood near the cross, bearing witness to his agony, steadfast in their love.

These women had followed Jesus from Galilee and provided for him out of their means. They refused to look away from his pain, even as others fled in fear and despair. Their presence at the foot of the cross testifies to the depth of their love and the strength of their faith.

Dorothy Day wrote about “the healing power of community and the long loneliness we all face.” I think of her wisdom when I consider what these women embodied at the cross—the healing power of simply being with others in their suffering.

When we're faced with someone else's suffering, we often feel helpless or inadequate. We worry that we'll say or do the wrong thing, that we can't possibly fix the situation. But the women who stayed with Jesus in his agony show us something different: sometimes the most profound gift we can offer is simply our presence—the willingness to bear witness, to share the pain, to sit with the unanswerable questions.

The witness of the women at the cross reminds us that love endures, that faithfulness and compassion have the power to heal even the most hopeless of situations. By remaining present to Jesus in his suffering, they became the first witnesses of the resurrection, the first to experience God's love breaking through death itself.

Holy Saturday

April 4, 2026

The Scent of Water

Robbin Brent

For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grow old in the earth, and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put out branches like a young plant.

—Job 14:7-9

Holy Saturday finds us in liminal space, waiting and unknowing. Jesus lies in the tomb and all of creation holds its breath. The pain of the crucifixion remains fresh, and we have seen our hopes crucified, our dreams shattered, and we don't yet know how the story ends.

Henry Vaughan wrote, "There is in God (some say) a deep, but dazzling darkness." We are held in the darkness of grief, waiting for a dawn that feels impossibly distant. Yet even now, hidden in the darkness, something dazzles—a light already present and returning, though we cannot see it. The Book of Job speaks of hope that comes "at the scent of water," the promise of new life even from what appears dead. As we keep vigil, we watch for hints—whispers of grace barely perceptible in the air.

Just as a seed gestates underground, just as new life is knit together in hidden depths, God's love continues its healing work beneath the surface. I lived in this kind of Holy Saturday darkness for seven years after my divorce—not knowing if the season for committed love would come again. The longing was there, hidden even from myself, tucked away where it couldn't be disappointed. I couldn't see what convergences might be taking shape: the opportunity, availability, maturation, healing from past pain and suffering, desire, history, geography. All of the infinite conditions that would need to come together. I could only wait, and trust, and keep my heart open.

I wonder now if those longings and prayers—spoken and unspoken—were like the scent of water that reaches the tree, joining with God's

Easter Sunday

April 5, 2026

Recognizing the Risen Christ

Scott and Robbin

*When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread,
blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their
eyes were opened, and they recognized him.*

—Luke 24:30-31

This Easter morning, we find ourselves drawn into the mystery at the heart of the resurrection stories: recognition. On the road to Emmaus, two disciples walked with the risen Jesus without knowing who he was—until he broke bread with them and their eyes were opened. At the garden tomb, Mary Magdalene and the other women encountered the risen Christ and recognized him not only with their physical eyes but with the eyes of their hearts, shaped by their intimate journey with him.

These women had walked with Jesus through the depths of suffering and death, remaining faithful even as others fled. Having witnessed the full extent of his love poured out on the cross, they had a unique capacity to perceive the resurrection reality breaking forth that morning.

The journey from Palm Sunday to Holy Saturday traces a path from heartbreak to hope, brokenness to redemption, isolation to loving communion—a path Jesus walks with us in his risen, scarred body. As we reflect on our own journey through Holy Week, we might ask what this week has revealed about the depth of Jesus' love and the power of his resurrection. Have we, like the women at the tomb and the disciples at Emmaus, been changed by our encounter with the crucified and risen Christ?

Those who stayed by Jesus' side show us what this kind of relationship with Jesus looks like. The more we walk with him through the valleys of shadow, the more we recognize his risen presence in our midst—even and especially in the places of our deepest woundedness and longing.

Scripture, Quotes, Prayers & Practices for Lent

Scripture Stories of Healing

Jacob Wrestles with God

The same night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.' The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

—Genesis 32:22-32

Elijah Under the Broom Tree

Ahab reported to Jezebel everything that Elijah had done, including the massacre of the prophets. Jezebel immediately sent a messenger to Elijah with her threat: "The gods will get you for this and I'll get even with you! By this time tomorrow you'll be as dead as any one of those prophets."

When Elijah saw how things were, he ran for dear life to Beersheba, far in the south of Judah. He left his young servant there and then went on into the desert another day's journey. He came to a lone broom bush and collapsed in its shade, wanting in the worst way to be done with it all—to just die: "Enough of this, God! Take my life—I'm ready to join

my ancestors in the grave!” Exhausted, he fell asleep under the lone broom bush.

Suddenly an angel shook him awake and said, “Get up and eat!” He looked around and, to his surprise, right by his head were a loaf of bread baked on some coals and a jug of water. He ate the meal and went back to sleep....

Then he was told, “Go, stand on the mountain at attention before God. God will pass by.”

A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn’t to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn’t in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn’t in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.

—1 Kings 19:1-6, 11-12 (*The Message* translation)

Jesus Cleanses a Leper

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, ‘If you choose, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

—Mark 1:40-45

Jesus Cures a Blind Man at Bethsaida

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, ‘Can you see anything?’ And the man looked up and said, ‘I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.’ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, ‘Do not even go into the village.’”

—Mark 8:22-26

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 'Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Stand up and take your mat and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the paralytic—'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.' And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'

—Mark 2:1-12

A Woman Healed

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

—Mark 5:27-34

The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

—Mark 10:46-52

Jesus Heals a Bent-Over Woman

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, 'There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.' But the Lord answered him and said, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?' When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

—Luke 13:10-13

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralysed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?' The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no

one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.' Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

—John 5:3-9

A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid

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of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

—John 9:1-41

Quotes

And this is important to remember: given the fact of pain as a normal part of the experience of life, one may make the pain contribute to the soul, to the life meaning. One may be embittered, ground down by it, but one need not be. The pain of life may teach us to understand life and, in our understanding of life, to love life. To love life truly is to be whole in all one's parts; and to be whole in all one's parts is to be free and unafraid.

—Howard Thurman

Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentment? Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions. I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits, here in this world and the life to come.

—Henri Nouwen

There is always a light. If only we are brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it.

—Amanda Gorman

We don't heal in isolation, but in community.

—S. Kelley Harrell

Compassion is the sometimes fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It's the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.

—Frederick Buechner

All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

—Julian of Norwich

Love and death are inextricably linked, because it is the very office of this kind of love to demonstrate that love is stronger than death, to melt the mask of death in the waters of pure self-giving.

—Cynthia Bourgeault

Prayers

*Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth;
lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust;
lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.*

—Universal Prayer for Peace

*For the peace from above,
For the Loving-kindness of God,
And for the salvation of our souls,
Let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mercy. [Amen.]*

—Book of Common Prayer, p. 383

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not
so much seek to be consoled as to console
Not so much to be understood as to understand
Not so much to be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying that we awake to eternal life. [Amen.]*

—St. Francis of Assisi

*May I be at peace.
May my heart remain open.
May I be aware of my true nature.
May I be healed.
May I be a source of healing to others.
May I dwell in the Breath of God.
[Amen.]*

—St. Teresa of Ávila

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Lord, help me to live this day, quietly, easily. To lean upon Thy great strength, trustfully, restfully. To wait for the unfolding of Thy will, patiently, serenely. To meet others, peacefully, joyously. To face tomorrow, confidently, courageously. [Amen.]

—Saint Francis of Assisi

Merciful Jesus, you are my guide, the joy of my heart, the author of my hope, and the object of my love. I come seeking refreshment and peace. Show me your mercy, relieve my fears and anxieties, and grant me a quiet mind and an expectant heart, that by the assurance of your presence I may learn to abide in you, who is my Lord and my God. Amen.

—Grace Cathedral

*God be in our heads, and in our understanding;
God be in our eyes, and in our looking;
God be in our mouths, and in our speaking;
God be in our hearts, and in our thinking;
God be at our ends, and at our departing. Amen.*

—Anonymous

*Holy Spirit of God,
Who is present in our inmost being,
fill us with your gifts.
Lead us into silence, quietness and peace.
Heal the wounds of a lifetime.
Take away those desires that are earthly created
and grant Your gift of wisdom,
Your goodness, Your truth ...
This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ,
who expresses in infinite ways
the Silence that is sheer 'isness.'
Amen.*

—Thomas Keating

Lenten Psalm of Longing

I thank you, Oh God

*for the warming of the winds
that brings a melting of the snow,
for daylight hours that daily grow longer and richer in the aroma of
Spring lingers beneath the horizon
as approaching echoes of Easter ring in my ears.*

I lift up my heart to you, Beloved,

in this season of Lent

*that gently sweeps across
my sluggish and sleeping heart, awakening me
to a deeper love for you.*

May the wind of the Spirit

*that drove Jesus into the desert, into the furnace of prayer,
also drive me with a passion during this Lenten season*

to enkindle the fire of my devotion in the desert of Lenten love.

*May I earnestly use this Holy Week to answer the call to return to You.
Amen.*

—Edward Hays, *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim*

*The world is struggling mightily, and
many are losing faith and hope.*

*God we know that You have all
the strength the world needs. We
pray that You will encircle us in
your deep peace, abiding hope,
and eternal love. “The world is too
dangerous for anything but truth
and too small for anything but
love.” Amen.*

—Robbin Brent, quote by William Sloane Coffin

*Compassionate God, support and strengthen all those who reach out in
love, concern, and prayer for the sick and distressed. In their acts of
compassion, may they know that they are your instruments. In their
concerns and fears may they know your peace. In their prayer may they
know your steadfast love. May they not grow weary or faint-hearted, for
your mercy’s sake. Amen.*

—Book of Common Prayer

Prayer and Contemplative Practices

Prayer connects us with the divine presence already permeating our lives. When we approach prayer as honest, intimate conversation with a loving presence, rooted in the simple needs and desires of our hearts, we find ourselves more at ease and inspired to pray in ways that truly resonate with our own experiences.

The Lord's Prayer offers a rich framework for integrating prayer and contemplative practice. After each line we offer suggestions for ways to more deeply engage with the prayer—and these practices can be applied to any of the prayers in the previous section as well:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Consider cultivating greater awareness of God's presence through practices like centering prayer or breath prayer.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

You might explore aligning your heart with compassion and divine will through *lectio divina* or Lovingkindness meditation.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Gratitude practice or mindful eating can deepen appreciation for daily sustenance.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

The examen of conscience offers one way to practice forgiveness and self-reflection.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Discernment prayer or the welcoming prayer can support you in navigating life's challenges.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Contemplative worship or nature meditation are possibilities for embracing trust and surrender.

These are simply suggestions—ways you might deepen your sense of connection with God. You'll find several of these practices described more fully in the Contemplative Practices section that follows.

Contemplative Practices

Contemplative Walk

Walking as a contemplative practice is an ancient tradition, as is expressed by both Augustine: “It is solved by walking,” and Friedrich Nietzsche: “All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking.” You can learn more about contemplative walking, also known as walking meditation, on our website: LivingCompass.org/ro2f.

The invitation to take a contemplative walk is both for those who are able to walk, as well as for those who are not able to walk. Perhaps you are sick, or confined to a place for other reasons, or you cannot physically walk. If this is true for you, try this practice with your eyes closed, or while watching a video or gazing at photographs of places in nature that inspire you. There are many ways to take a contemplative walk as you focus on the inner walk of faith. Here are three simple ideas to help you get started. Note that any of these can be done solo, with another person, or with a small group.

- **Choose a question, situation, or challenge you wish to ponder and wonder about, perhaps related to cultivating healing and wholeness.** As you walk, open your heart, mind, and soul to the wisdom of the Spirit as you consider, silently or aloud, “I wonder what I might do or say about _____?” “I wonder what God might guide me to do or say about _____?” Allow yourself to be curious. Don’t force an answer or resolution; simply walk and reflect on possible insights you may not previously have been able to see.
- **Walk with a Scripture verse.** The daily reflections in this devotional offer many choices, as well as the collection on pp. 71–76.
- **Walk in nature.** Walk slowly, noticing the wonder of God’s creation, perhaps pausing from time to time to pay attention to how nature itself demonstrates the eternal rhythms of healing and wholeness—the abundance of a flowering tree, the roots and seeds lying dormant beneath frozen ground, the faithful return of seasons and cycles.

Lovingkindness Prayer Practice

As we cultivate healing and wholeness, we can offer this prayer:

May you be happy.

May you be healthy.

May you be safe.

May you live with ease.

May you know God's healing.

May you share God's love.

Each time you say this prayer, first think of those you love. Then, as you repeat the prayer, you may want to bring in those you find challenging to love right now, and those you have never met. Be sure to pray for yourself.

Receive & Release Practice

This practice focuses on two words: *receive* and *release*. Here are some simple instructions for getting started.

- First, find a comfortable sitting position and begin to take deep, slow breaths.
- After you have relaxed and settled into the gentle rhythm of your breathing, begin to say the word *receive* silently in your mind each time you inhale, and the word *release* as you exhale. So, it's *receive* as you inhale, and *release* as you exhale. These two words will also help to focus your mind whenever it begins to wander.
- As you repeat the word *receive*, imagine yourself receiving the gift of love and deep care God has to offer you and wants to give to you right now.
- As you repeat the word *release*, imagine yourself releasing to God what it is you need to let go of at this time.
- Start by doing this practice for three to five minutes (it can be helpful to set a quiet timer at the beginning).
- If you have a particular prayer concern, you can use this practice to assist you in finding peace and guidance regarding your concern. Bring the concern to mind as you begin the "Receive, Release" practice. You may even find that you are given a different word or phrase that comes to mind to use in place of *receive* or *release*. You might, for example, find yourself mindfully repeating "patience," "peace," "joy," or "kindness," on your in-breath and perhaps something like "control," "anger," "fear," or "judgment" on the out-breath.

Rosebush Examen for Children* (of all ages)

In this approach to learning the Examen, the authors suggested asking children to picture a rosebush. However, we found that metaphor really helpful for ourselves and others either new to the practice, or too tired at the end of a long day to remember all the steps in their proper order. Perhaps it might be helpful for you too.

Here are the instructions: Picture a rosebush, which has roses, thorns, and buds. Then think of them this way: • Roses = joyful thing or things from the day where you experienced a sense of wholeness and well-being. • Thorns = a painful or challenging experience where you struggled to feel whole and well. • Buds = possibilities for growth in cultivating healing and wholeness in heart, soul, body, or mind.

What roses, thorns, and buds did your day or week hold?

**From New Directions for Holy Questions by Claire Brown and Anita Peebles, shared in Seasons of Wonder by Bonnie Smith Whitehouse, pp. 181–182*

Examen Practice

A way of paying attention as we listen for God. The Daily Examen is an ancient and powerful way of reflecting on the day so that we can more clearly identify how and where God has shown up in our lives and where God may be guiding us. Following is a brief description of the practice.

At the end of the day, sit quietly for a few minutes, seeking God's presence. Then:

- Remember times in the day when you felt most alive, when you experienced or shared healing, wholeness, connection, or love, and thank God for those moments.
- Remember instances when you felt the least grateful, and offer those with thanks to God.
- Notice times in the day when you experienced being aligned with God's purpose for you, and give thanks for those times.
- Notice any moments when you felt far from living out God's purpose for your life, when cultivating healing and wholeness felt challenging, and offer those to God.
- Ask God to help you live ever more closely to God's plan and purpose for you tomorrow, growing in healing and wholeness, and then turn everything over to God to hold while you rest.

—For more resources, a good place to start is the Ignatian Spirituality's website: bit.ly/38De8gc

Welcoming Prayer Practice

As we focus on cultivating greater healing and wholeness this Lent, this practice has the capacity to quickly and effectively dislodge us from our habitual reactions, emotional patterns, and limiting comfort zones. Using it can help move us through challenging or painful experiences, times of disturbed emotion or anguish, and even moments where unhelpful control tendencies and self-inflation takes us over.

Three steps for the Welcoming Prayer Practice:

1. **Focus or “sink in”** to become aware and physically present to the particular experience or upset without analyzing or judging yourself or the situation. Don’t try to change anything at this stage—just stay present.
2. **Welcome and lightly name** the response that is being triggered by the difficult situation, such as *fear* or *anger* or *pain*. Acknowledge the response as sensation, and recognize that in this moment, if the experience is not being rejected or repressed, it can be endured. Ever so gently, begin to say “welcome,” such as “welcome fear,” “welcome resentment,” etc. Though this step is counter-intuitive and the impulse is most likely to try to push away the unpleasant emotion, Cynthia Bourgeault explains: “By welcoming it instead, you create an atmosphere of inner hospitality. By embracing the thing you once defended yourself against or ran from, you are actually disarming it, removing its power to hurt you or chase you back into your smaller self.” This practice of patient, generous welcome creates space for the healing and wholeness we seek.
3. **Transition to a “letting go,”** whereby the intensity of the situation can recede. This enables the natural fluidity of sensation to come and then go.

—For more on the Welcome Prayer/Practice, go to: <https://bit.ly/2Sqtj0R>
