



*All Things  
New*

*Hope in the  
Time of  
Pandemic*

*2022 Lenten  
Devotional*

# Introduction

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An empty hangar  
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Tides are turning*

**Rev. K.C. Van Atta-Casebier**  
**Associate Pastor**  
**Director of Family Ministries**

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Foundry's 28th annual Lenten Devotional centers on the scripture, Isaiah 43:1-19, and explores what it means to be called to hope after two years of living in multiple pandemics.

The Lenten Devotional is one of Foundry's volunteer Discipleship Ministries, under the direction of Rev. Will Ed Green, Associate Pastor and Director of Discipleship.

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Special thanks to: Pastor Ginger, Kaylon Rutledge, Bryan Villarroel and the Foundry staff, the small groups, and all who participated in the creative community that produced these reflections.

When a devotional moves you, consider sharing your thoughts with the author or someone you feel may find it meaningful.

You can find a PDF version of this devotional at [foundryumc.org/devotional](https://foundryumc.org/devotional).



# MARCH 2, 2022

## Ash Wednesday

*Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need  
For this bright morning dawning for you.  
History, despite its wrenching pain  
Cannot be unlived, but if faced  
With courage, need not be lived again.  
Lift up your eyes upon  
This day breaking for you.  
Give birth again  
To the dream.*

*Women, children, men,  
Take it into the palms of your hands,  
Mold it into the shape of your most  
Private need. Sculpt it into  
The image of your most public self.  
Lift up your hearts  
Each new hour holds new chances  
For a new beginning.*

- From "On the Pulse of Morning"

These powerful words of the late African American poet Maya Angelou speak to the guiding thread of this year's Lenten Devotional. On Ash Wednesday, we give thanks for God's Spirit that breathes love and life into our dust-formed bodies, commit to journey through Lent with holy intention, turn our gaze inward to examine the state of our heart, and outward to review how we move through the created world.

Today and throughout this season, the invitation is to trust that God's goodness and mercy pursue us all the days of our lives, that God's love for us is new every morning, and that, by God's grace, we will be able to perceive both what is good, beautiful, and true and what needs to be different.

Jokes are made nowadays about all that's been given up in the pandemic, making Lenten fasts moot. "It's been one long Lent!" people cry. What if we take these days to reflect on how, in this "long Lent," Spirit has been busy opening, closing, or moving things within our lives?

These Lenten devotionals will help you do just that. I pray that each day's offering will give you strength to hope and "Lift up your eyes upon / This day breaking..."

**Rev. Ginger E. Gaines-Cirelli**  
**Senior Pastor**

# MARCH 3, 2022

## Practicing Hope

In January 2020, I had a breakdown when a case I was working on didn't end the way we hoped. I was exhausted, heartbroken, and couldn't find a way out of my depression. After some rest, therapy, and journaling I remembered these words: "If you can't find God, go where you last encountered her."

So, I poured over the mystics, liberation theologians, and scripture. I remembered that the scriptures record our ancestors' experiences of loss and hopelessness. I learned that hope is not wishful thinking but is rather our connection to God's steadfast love and promise of beloved community.

This connection can feel as firm as the ground beneath our feet. This connection guides us to seek justice and healing because we are certain that we will experience God's promised beloved community. Yet just as Job's hope is uprooted like a tree's roots (Job 19:10) our hope, our certainty, can crumble beneath us.

It's in these moments that hope appears intangible, practiced patiently in community, often alongside our doubts and fears. In Hebrews 6:10-20, the author promises that when everything is lost, we realize the full assurance of hope in our care for each other. Even when, especially when, we can't find hope ourselves, the Holy Spirit draws us together in loving relationships. There we practice hope in the covenant of Abraham, rephrased by Jesus, by loving the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, and soul and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

In my study, I realized that it's when we can't feel the love of God that the community carries our hope for us until we can feel it again. Loving us until we can love again. Until we can hope again.

**Cassandra Lawrence**



# MARCH 4, 2022

## Known by What Name?

*But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.*

Isaiah 43:1 NASB

Will.

Will Ed.

Will Will.

William Edward.

I've been known by many names. Each represents some part of who I am.

Names have power to build up and encourage. To tear down and destroy. To help us find belonging or to deny our being. Changing a name, or embracing a new name that more fully reflects our identity, can liberate us for more full and abundant life. Speaking a name—intimately amongst beloveds—can build bridges of care and support that sustain us in the most difficult of times.

As we begin this journey into hope, the names we choose for ourselves make all the difference. Perhaps this is why it is so important that Isaiah begins this word to our forebears by reminding them of the only name that matters. Mine.

God reminds us that the worth with which we're created isn't bound to our past, present, or future. It is given to us by the One who breathed life into us and created all that is. We belong--we are--because we are God's. God has claimed us will never leave or forsake us--no matter the circumstances.

Throughout Lent, then, let us embrace the hope that, regardless of the journey we travel, we have the guarantee that we do not travel alone, that we belong and have worth. Let us remind ourselves, as often as needed, that the hope that God gives us is in the name "mine." And in doing so remember that hope—as those named and claimed by God-- is always inbreaking.

**Rev. Will Ed Green**  
**Associate Pastor**  
**Director of Discipleship Ministries**

**MARCH 5, 2022**  
**With So Many Questions**

I must love what awaits  
my discovery, peel the  
skin of questions down to the quick.

Must I stand  
and wait then as Milton  
said of those who serve? Against  
all that is veiled  
in opaque tomorrows I  
upturn my palms, a beggar in waiting.

I lean against the sky,  
a harvest of stars  
gathering my thought  
balloons. With so many questions  
backed up to be asked, I  
am monitoring mists of midnight,  
enthralled with the  
slightest leakage of light.

**Sunny Branner**  
**From her book, "Windsong: A Life in Poetry"**

# MARCH 6, 2022

## What's Good About New?

*See I am doing a new thing!*  
*Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*  
Isaiah 43:19 NIV

For me, the word “new” has almost always had a positive connotation. An improvement over the old! Something exciting and different! Over the last half dozen years, however, new has lost its appeal. Every day of the last administration seemed to bring some new scandal, some new outrage. The new way of communicating via social media seems to be at least as dangerous as it is convenient. The new/novel coronavirus is certainly unwelcome as is the new divisiveness and disregard for the common good.

“See I am doing a new thing!” OK, but truth be told, I am more apprehensive than eager to see whatever it is. I’m not sure how much more new I can take! I don’t perceive much that is positive.

Of course, I don’t want to go back to much of what we thought was normal — thoughtlessness about white privilege, ignorance of how much we are damaging the earth’s environment with our travel and synthetic fabrics, facile assumptions about political stability. I definitely appreciate the greater awareness of our responsibilities and challenges.

Maybe awareness is the “new thing” that I am supposed to perceive and reflect upon during Lent. May it be so.

**Margie McKelvey**



# MARCH 7, 2022

## News Flash

I often envy my great-grandparents for their lack of overwhelming world news. Oh, they eventually had to deal with a war overseas, but they were not bombarded daily by articles or podcasts about a volcano near Tonga that obliterated all the housing on three islands or about more ice shelves calving into the rising ocean or about another hate crime or about the increasing threats against voting rights or about the astronomical compensation packages for America's CEOs. They heard about Mrs. Brown's increasing difficulty walking or that the McCord's had a hard time feeding their children. And they could help.

What can I do when I feel so hopeless in the face of so much trouble? I've thought about not watching the nightly news. I've considered only reading the Post's newsletter The Optimist. But that is just hiding from reality.

I need guidance from God. Do I have the courage to ask for that? And then I read these words about Judah in Isaiah 6:8-10:

He said, "Go and tell these people:  
Be ever hearing, but never understanding;  
Be ever seeing, but never perceiving;  
Make the heart of this people calloused;  
Make their ears dull and close their eyes.  
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
Understand with their hearts,  
And turn and be healed."

**Anonymous**

# MARCH 8, 2022

## Hope in the Time of Pandemic

*Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*  
Romans 5:1 NIV

I didn't see it coming. Now, two years into a pandemic robbing me of hope, I want hope returned. I quickly grew tired of hopelessness. Would the pandemic ever end?

In March 2020, I buckled in for my flight from North Carolina to Florida, unaware of a new public health menace, COVID-19. A new, highly contagious virus targeted older adults (like me) and people with severe underlying medical conditions (like me). Nursing home lockdowns followed with heartbreaking scenes of elderly patients staring through windows at an outside world many would never experience again.

Two years on, healthcare workers are worn down. First responders, frontline workers approached and then surpassed burnout. It feels hopeless. Lockdowns, fear, mask (don't mask), misinformation led us down a rabbit hole where trust, civility, and common sense were discarded.

We hoped for vaccines and safety protocols to believe there's light at the end of a tunnel. We first had to find the tunnel. With no sunny side of the street, many of us felt despair. I searched for upper-case Hope in God, to abide in the Lord, to receive, believe, and trust that Jesus is everything you and I need.

A new virtual world of online worship, virtual medical appointments, and Zoom brought people together, defying geographical limitations. Unlike the Black Plague, we found lower-case hope and vaccines. COVID-19 brought pain but allowed us to share our faith community in bold, new ways. It gave me access to a new virtual community of writers.

I put my faith in my upper-case Hope, God. That's the light at the end of the tunnel.

**Chuck Waldron**

# MARCH 9, 2022

## Finding Rest in The Now but Not Yet

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past*  
Isaiah 43:18 NIV

Dwelling on the past has been a pesky habit I have had since early adolescence. It has crept into my life in insidious ways — through dreams, replaying experiences in my head, or ruminating on the different paths I could have taken. Isaiah's message to the Israelites is to think about having patience as they awaited their deliverance from captivity. Similarly, we await God's promise of healing from our "former ways" of living.

As a millennial grade school teacher, I get impatient with myself. I work hard, getting up hours before the sun to prepare for my day and prepare my mind for the compassion and patience I need to show my students.

Isaiah is reminding the Israelites to set their sights on what's ahead as they are about to be exiled again, this time from Babylon. They are probably thinking, when will this be over? When will things be better? When will there be a "new thing?" In my early morning quiet time, sipping my coffee and yawning, I often wonder, when will it be less exhausting? To be an adult, to be a teacher, to be a human? When will I be able to find true, sustained rest?

There has not been a clear deadline, but I know God has helped to transform my mind when it comes to rest and my worth. I now prioritize sleep and exercise consistently. I give myself a lot of down time. I am more gentle with myself. God's promise of rest is ever-renewing, and it is about us finding a renewed spirit in the promise that things can be better, even if we are not there yet.

**Alexa Arboleda**



# MARCH 10, 2022

## To Young Parents

We see you, moms and dads, struggling in currents of pandemic life that are so unpredictable and relentless that you could be swept away at any moment. We see you nurturing, partnering, protecting while simultaneously working, schedule-juggling, and multi-tasking- non-stop, every day, without relief and no clear path to best choices. It's overwhelming. We see that and sense that your voice is too strained by time and exhaustion to call out—even for help, if help could come without risk of infection.

We're with you, moms and dads. Although we once walked in your shoes we know yours are worn wearier than ours ever were. So, we stand with you spiritually until we truly can be there with you. Until then, we offer our love and heartfelt prayers.

### **Prayer:**

*Dear God, parent of us all,*

*Help us to remember that the grace we receive freely from you is grace we can pass on to our children and to each other. Help us to start each day renewed by your spirit to do our best. But knowing that while we have agency to make a difference, we are not in control of how the day will unfold. Help us to stop and breathe, to notice wonder, to not be ruled by what's on our daily to do lists, and to remember that asking for help from you and from those who love us, is not a sign of weakness, but a sign that we need community, and a family much wider than our nuclear families, to live lives that will make you smile. Amen.*

**Two Grandmothers**

# MARCH 11, 2022

## Keep Going

"If you're going through hell, keep going." Years ago, my friend Ali gave me a card with this sentiment by Winston Churchill written on the front. The words formed a spiral in white lettering against a black background. I was in my mid-20s at the time. I'd recently come out, was wrestling with the church, and wondering what was next for me.

Lost and unsure of myself, I remember reading the words and was honestly stumped by their meaning. Perhaps I'd assumed hell was like Dante's Inferno, with a series of rings descending. Maybe I'd thought hell and heaven were polar opposites, with earth wedged in between.

In any case, I was quite sure that if I was going through hell and if I kept going, I would certainly just keep finding more hell.

Then, 15 years later and two years into the pandemic, my mind closed like the shuttered front windows of my friendly neighborhood sandwich shop. My isolation had taken a toll. It took weeks of support for me to find my way through. I didn't know what was before me. But I walked (or stumbled!) through it.

The other day, I was standing waiting for my acupuncturist on her front porch. Rays of sunshine poured through the white-gray clouds down on the wet, cold street, and I took a deep breath. Then, those words of Churchill came to mind, and I realized what I hadn't years ago. The card wasn't nihilistic.

I now love that Ali gave me that card. She knew something I didn't. If you are going through hell, take heart, and keep going. Something else is on the other side.

**Jessica "Jessie" M. Smith**

# MARCH 12, 2022

## Patiently Waiting

*But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it  
patiently.*

Romans 8:25 NIV



### **Prayer:**

*God, help us all to stay patient and positive. For our vulnerable populations, sustain bodies and spirits. Protect the elderly and all those suffering from chronic diseases. Give everyone the necessary caution to keep from unwittingly spreading the disease. Let us see it through to the end, God. Amen.*

**Ta-Chen Wu**



# MARCH 13, 2022

## Hope

Faith, *hope* and *love*. Scripture tells us the greatest of these is *love*. I accept that of course, but there are many times I find *hope* to be much more utilitarian, much more of a lifeline, a more durable emotion, often a last resort. Our *love* interests may fail, our *love* may be unrequited, we may find we're loving the wrong things. Remember the framed adage hanging in many homes, "*Love never fails.*" Never? No matter, we can always turn to *hope* and say with fresh assurance, "Oh, I *hope* so."

The Scripture for this year's Lenten essay is Isaiah 43. Two or three times early in the passage the Lord tells us, "Fear not." I like to tie this passage to Jeremiah 29, "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." The Scripture seems to be telling us: Whatever our fears, we can turn them to *hope*.

Several years ago on a flight from Moscow to Belgrade, I had a short but remarkable conversation with a Russian woman. Later, struggling with her English, she wrote me:

"I never had been so much pious person.... But, few years ago I realized about God a lot of thing. Every things had change in my life; it like I was born in new life. All I did it my every night thanks for God help; I don't ask for any think from God I just ask him about give me a patience and a hope...."

Then, a few sentences later: "Is it not God wish and sing?????"

That's it, I think. Let *hope* dispel our fears, and maybe even help us to *love* when it's hard to do so.

**Wesley G. Pippert**

# MARCH 14, 2022

## Jeremiah 29

When Chris and I married in 2010, we planned a celebration of our love, commitment, and future. We invited family and friends from around the world to join us at 16th and P Streets on a sticky August evening as we exchanged our vows.

Ahead of the ceremony, I selected Jeremiah 29:11 for the scripture reading. Like Isaiah 43's message of rejuvenation from desolation, Jeremiah's encouraging letter to the Israelites in Babylon instilled confidence. Jeremiah reminded the nostalgic exiles of God's commitment to care for them and not to harm them, a promise of a future no matter how bad the present seemed.

I chose this verse as a blessing for life to be everything I'd hoped: good. I earnestly hoped my trials would be doable and non-disruptive. Sickness, yes, but pandemics? Those were not on my list. Neither were protracted adoptions, life-changing career swings, the ensuing identity crises, parenting (no adjectives needed), or all-consuming stress.

Clearly, I missed the point. The verses preceding Jeremiah 29:11 call for patience and living in the present. Jeremiah instructed the exiles to build houses, grow gardens, even celebrate momentous occasions because it might be 70 years before realizing the prophecy.

Seventy years? Part of me wanted to change the scripture selection! Part of me wanted to believe in the promise even though I couldn't see it yet.

I'm still trying to understand the new opportunities God presents when life doesn't go as planned. Instead of hoping to get through the disappointing changes, the constant challenges, even this interminable pandemic, I'm slowly daring to experience hope in tough times. When the big moments don't materialize how we traditionally imagined, we risk missing goodness re-imagined for now. As God asks through Isaiah, "Do you not perceive it?"

**Oni K. Blair**

# MARCH 15, 2022

## New Heart

Let's skip way back to 1968. It's spring early release after the nation's grave tragedy. Robin Uchida, Elaine Chow, and I waited endlessly for a bus when five unknown girls stopped. One yelled at me, "Your daddy killed Martin Luther King."

I shouted, "No he did not." And we argued as two girls wrestled away my books and money. When I complained, a kind girl gave me bus fare. All this hurt my spirit and I was scared. That summer, I went to the Civic Center Pow Wow to see my friend Micky Matthews dance in her gorgeous Oglala Sioux dress.

In '69, I went with a couple from Seattle First Baptist to hear Billy Graham and I just had to walk to the front of the auditorium for belief in God the Savior. That year, I was baptized in water at church to have a new heart. Ezekial 36:26-38 says, "Turn and live." John 3:7: "You must be born anew."

Foundry studies in the 90's with Annie Belle Daisy and Sally Matthews taught me how to pray with icons, Lectio Divina and Intercession, another new piece of heart. Thanks. My new stent last September 1 gave me permission to retire and be of grateful service.

### **Prayer:**

*Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

**Jeanette Barker**



# MARCH 16, 2022

## Faith and Hope

*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*

Revelation 21:4 NIV

It is often said "hope springs eternal." I repeat this often but I fear hope is not enough. I find myself being fearful and anxious. I want things fixed now. I don't like the feeling of helplessness. I want to help get things done (that makes me a good behind the scene worker) but what I can do seems so little, especially at this time with COVID. Despite vaccination, booster, and monthly testing, I am unable to do more to keep others safe. So many others are having "breakthrough" incidents.

I see young children unable to go out and meet others outside of the immediate family therefore limiting social skills. They only know cousins as friends. So many activities are curtailed for young people and adults alike. Seniors who need human touch are denied because we want to keep them safe. Frustration seeps through.

I ask myself, where is your faith? I say this will pass and things will return to "normal," but I know it will not be the same as before. It will be a new normal and I am not trusting.

What keeps me going are songs such as "How can I keep from singing:"

What though the tempest 'round me roars  
I hear the truth, it liveth  
What though the darkness 'round me close  
Songs in the night it giveth  
No storm can shake my inmost calm  
While to the Rock I'm clinging  
Since Love is Lord of heaven and earth  
How can I keep from singing?

**Fay Allen**

# MARCH 17, 2022

## A Way in the Wilderness

Almost exactly two years ago this third week in January, I was changing planes at the Houston airport. It was there that I saw a small, simple notice taped on a wall: "If you have visited Wuhan, China, please contact...." Hmm, I thought, I'd never heard of Wuhan.

I don't think I had heard of Zoom either. Or social distancing. Or KN95s.

In the time since then, a disturbing thought gradually entered my consciousness: What if my habits and attitudes have changed so much that what would have been considered abnormal is now normal? Will I have trouble readjusting back to the 2019 version of normal? Is normal permanently lost? Was 2019 even normal to begin with?

Reflecting on Isaiah 43, I have largely dismissed those negative thoughts. Time and time again, God delivers. God remained steadfast for the ancient Israelites and does so for us today. Hope endures. While the coronavirus has created a sort of 'Babylonian Captivity' for us, when restrictions seem interminable and we seem stuck, Isaiah 43 reminds us that eventually God directs the "seas to open up" to provide a means of escape. A way is made in the wilderness. The crooked is made straight.

Yet, that is not to say that the way God will make for us is simply a return to the old way. So, while I am confident that fulsome hugs and handshakes will return, Isaiah teaches us to look for new things and be open to them. Yes, indeed; there is much reason for hope.

### **Prayer:**

*Although we can't help but to want things to return to the way they were before, help us be fully open and receptive to new things that God has in store for us.*

**Michael Lawson**

# MARCH 18, 2022

## Thinking Further

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

Five years ago, I submitted a Lenten Devotional with this verse talking. I shared about a recent experience on Mount St. Helens and how I found inspiration in reforested slopes. Trees had grown back after a volcanic eruption destroyed what was there before, and I loved that metaphor. I said, "As with nature, we experience change. It's up to us how we respond, whether we grow trees in our own lives."

I was wrong about that. The intervening five years, especially the last two, have taught me that it's not "up to us how we respond, whether we grow into trees." We can't put the full weight of who we become solely on ourselves through some exacting push toward transformation. We don't change in isolation. We're surrounded and shaped by what's around us. And sometimes what's around us is really hard. So, what to do?

Be gentle with ourselves and challenge the world.

Remind ourselves that all we can do is our best, which is sometimes just barely enough.

Demand that the world do its best.

Give grace to people but not systems.

Give ourselves permission to be uncertain, but continue to call the world toward a certain path.

I don't know what plans the Lord has for me. None of us do. And we can't put the weight of becoming that solely on ourselves. But we – together – become who we are meant to be when we work toward the world we are meant to build. To plant trees together, to love one another, to do justice.

**Beth Scott**

# MARCH 19, 2022

## The Same Old Thing

*If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

2 Corinthians 5:17

Read 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 is the origin of the proverb, “there’s nothing new under the sun,” which appears to contradict the potential for God’s new thing. Solomon, however, was emphasizing the cyclic nature of life and the repetitive emptiness of living only for the “rat race” in a life separated from God.

Today, we exist in pandemic mode, living in fear of lost control and unimaginable suffering. Despite our desire to return to the insanity we considered normal, the greater fear is for what is to come.

My mother died recently. Fourteen years ago, she broke her neck in a fall and I became her care-giver. I was overcome with dread after moving to Florida, and my life changed from engaged social connectivity to one of separation and solitude. In the introspective gloom that followed, time slowed, and the light of the universe revealed a new thing, the divine spirit within.

I experienced a “present knowing” of the living water Jesus referenced to the woman at the well. Perspectives shifted. The darkness, the precursor to light, and the circumstances shared with my mother were renewed as a source of true joy.

Her loss now has upended my world. Less stressful are the more expected fears of pain and loneliness, and more terrifying the impenetrable numbness and absence of purpose. But there remains knowing within, the fruit of the same old thing done times before by God, offering ways of experiencing new life through our timeless connection to Spirit.

Nothing real can be threatened,  
Nothing unreal exists.  
Therein lies the peace of God.  
–A Course in Miracles.

**Karl N. Marshall**



# MARCH 20, 2022

## God's New Thing

In 1981, I had the privilege of being appointed pastor of a congregation in Syracuse where Norman Vincent Peale discovered the power of positive thinking back in the late 1920's. By the time I arrived, membership and finances had declined to a critical point. People had moved away. Many thought the congregation would close soon. Yet, a very unusual thing happened in my first weeks. Nearly every leader wanted to talk to me about their plans for the church. Something was going on.

To focus our spiritual discernment, we read Isaiah 43:19: "Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It is happening already... you can see it now," (TEV). Attitudes changed. Priorities moved from saving the church institution to investing energies in the needs all around us and around the world. New groups and projects emerged from within the congregation.

Just as the Israelites who were freed by Cyrus faced a difficult journey home, today, we live in perilous times where the way ahead is clouded by moral compromises, lies, greed, power grabs, climate disasters, and a seemingly never-ending pandemic. This leads us to wonder what may be coming next.

Hope, however, comes as we face the very things that trouble us, using our imaginations to help us discover what God is doing. The question is very personal for each of us. Sometimes our words and biases get in the way. Are we able to allow our minds and hearts to search freely for God's New Thing?

Jan and I attended Foundry for 10 years before the pandemic and we attend virtually nearly every Sunday. Here we found a congregation attuned to God's presence and willing to change to meet emergent challenges. We celebrate all of you and your faithfulness.

**Hal Garman**

# MARCH 21, 2022

## Scary Times - Hopeful Times

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [contending only with physical opponents], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this [present] darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly (supernatural) places. Therefore, put on the complete armor of God, so that you will be able to [successfully] resist and stand your ground in the evil day [of danger], and having done everything [that the crisis demands], to stand firm [in your place, fully prepared, immovable, victorious].*

Ephesians 6:12-13, Amplified Bible

Friends, I didn't think I had much to say this year, but after looking around and observing the people I know, I think we should be paying more attention to the mental health component of a pandemic that mutates endlessly, thanks to a dysfunctional world "health" network that values profits over people. On top of that, I think of the emotional trauma we've been experiencing from the coward of all cowards (who also refuses to go away), his supporters, and the cowardly politicians who know better but are deathly afraid of him.

Pay close attention to the people with whom you interact. Look for unpredictable behavior, even within yourself. Try to take the time to be present to anyone who needs a sympathetic, supportive ear. We will all need the strength to unite with like-minded people, churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and civic groups to fight the spread of disease, hunger, homelessness, racism, fascism, militarism, anti-democracy, and a rapidly heating planet that is becoming uninhabitable.

I'm thinking back 45 years when President Jimmy Carter, symbolically, put solar panels on the roof of the White House. Last I heard, those solar panels are being used by a New England college. Maybe these times will teach us to make some better personal and collective decisions!

**Chuck Kluepfel**

# MARCH 22, 2022

## Hide and Seek

*But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

2 Corinthians 3: 16-18 NIV

I have many fond memories of playing Hide and Seek growing up. The game was easy to start because its rules were so simple. I recall being very good at it. In hindsight, I think this is because I often had to blend into new environments while being raised within a military family. For better or for worse, my ability to quickly adapt in challenging situations has improved as I've moved through various seasons of my adult life.

As I look back upon the last two years during the pandemic, I see that we've all had to involuntarily learn how to play Hide and Seek. We wear masks and other precautionary measures to simply survive and avoid causing accidental harm to others. Through sheer faith, I continue to optimistically count from "2020, 2021, 2022" towards a future where we can safely seek connection with others without having to utilize isolating masks, both visible and invisible.

Indeed, I long for a time when we all can feel authentically found by a loving God who's no longer hidden by any veil, but who we can clearly see has been right by our side in Spirit during our entire life's journey.

### **Prayer:**

*Precious Lord, may we all feel found and seen by you today with the eyes of a beloved child. In the transformative name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.*

**Eric Walker**

# MARCH 23, 2022

## My Dear Physician

*There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*

Revelation 21:4 NIV

In October, my leg cramps were excruciating. The earliest available appointment with my neurologist was on December 29. Coping patiently, I looked forward to finding a resolution. On each of the three days before my appointment, the clinic called to check on my well-being. During the third call, I asked the office manager if the doctor preferred that I cancel. She explained that they were calling because they were concerned that the doctor would contract coronavirus.

On December 29, I reported to the office manager that I had no coronavirus symptoms. Surprisingly, she said there was no co-pay. WHAAAT? Fifteen minutes after the appointed time, I was taken to an examination room, where I waited for nearly half an hour. A nurse then took me to a second examination room, and I waited at near refrigerator temperatures for another 20 minutes. My anxiety was peaking.

Finally, there was a tap at the door and my neurologist entered elbows extended, moving like a whirling dervish. It dawned on me she wanted to greet me with elbow bumps. I complied. She was a bundle of joy, chatting at her usual rapid rate. I was the center of attention for nearly half an hour. It felt good. I listed my concerns in detail. She examined me, took copious notes and made a diagnosis.

With a prescription, FDA-approved, from the clinic's pharmacy and renewed hope for being pain free, I walked to my car with a smile under my mask. The pharmacist said the med was complimentary. Another WHAAAT?

### **Prayer:**

*Remind me often, Lord, that hope abounds. It's mine 24/7. Thank you. Amen.*

**Stephen Roberts**

# MARCH 24, 2022

## Letting Go of Normal

On January 7, 2020, I wrote in my journal: My hopes and dreams for the next year is that nothing really changes.

I just have to laugh every time I read that. COVID changed everything. And while I have not suffered the losses so many people have, particularly in communities of color, the past two years have worn on me like most of you. I seek escapism rather than discipline. I just want to go back to the pre-pandemic normal.

But what if God is doing something new? I ask myself if I am open to letting go of my "normal" to participate? Am I preparing myself for this new thing or just hoping that my personal comforts aren't impacted by this new thing? I have a routine I like and plans for fun trips and an early retirement. What if this new thing messes all that up?

I am reminded of the story in the 12th chapter of Luke about the rich man who builds bigger barns to hold all his wealth and, afterwards, thinks now he can enjoy himself. God called him a fool. I read St. Augustine's 36th sermon where he points out that greed (hoarding money), the desire for luxuries (spending money), and God all offer me very different visions of what is good. Greed says a big 401k will protect me from change. Luxuries promise me comfort and escapism during change.

God says that true life is only found in God. Maybe letting go of my normal is what will bring me true joy. Maybe the new thing is better than any future I have imagined. The unexpected – the disruptions – can be faced with hope.

To quote David Bowie: maybe it's time to "turn and face the strange ch-ch-changes."

**Joanne Garlow**



# MARCH 25, 2022

## But of Course That's Impossible

*I am doing a new thing... do you not perceive it?*

Isaiah 43:19 NIV

When you're sure that something you hope for is impossible, the more likely it will be. I know because there have been times that such a hope seemed as absurd as, for example, a talking dog.

Then I read a book, *How Stella Learned to Talk*, which revealed that dogs, in fact, can talk– at least at the toddler level. The author, Christina Hunger, a speech-language pathologist, is the first person to use augmentative and alternative communication to enable a dog to use human language.

I was thrilled with this information and shared Stella's amazing story with several people. However, they looked at me in blank disbelief. No one even asked questions. This was disappointing. Then it became thought-provoking.

Is this the way we might react when God wants us to do a new thing? Do we treat it as something beyond even imagining? Reject the new thing out of hand?

Fear – that it would make us too anxious – can stop us from trying. The new thing could seem so outside anything we'd ever dreamed of that it strikes us as too ridiculous to even consider. Our minds run away to the comfort of more familiar ideas. Or, we acknowledge its possibility someday but not now. Now could be too dangerous. After all, the new thing might destroy the imperfect, but tolerable, good we already have.

Learning about the amazing ability that dogs possess helped me see that I need to recognize ways I might open myself to new possibilities. I could be shutting down just when I need to be opening up to a new thing.

The first result is this devotional.

**Patricia Wood**

# MARCH 26, 2022

## Leaning into Fear in Order to Grow into Myself

I've never been more scared than when I said yes to a surprise opportunity to move to Japan in spring 2021. Years of being underemployed and underutilized left me a shrunken version of my former self. I had somehow become comfortable with this halfhearted living. The pandemic didn't help with isolation and constant anxiety, and I fretted over the job offer for weeks.

To be honest, I still don't know why I said yes. The only words I can use to describe it are divine intervention. I've struggled for a long time to my faith in God and let go of a sense of control. But, in that instant, I decided to take a leap, pack up my life, and move across the world.

I haven't regretted this decision for a single second. Am I homesick? Of course. I miss so much about my past life, especially the community I had begun to find. And, I still struggle with fear, even from things as small as stepping out of my apartment or buying a bus pass in Japanese.

However, for the first time in almost 10 years, I finally care about what I'm doing. I finally feel like I'm contributing to society and using my strengths to help other people. I'm grateful for the love and kindness I received from Foundry as I wrestled with this decision. Despite my fear, I had a place of safety to help me process this transition. I was welcomed with open arms as exactly who I was, fears and all.

Life out here can still be difficult and lonely, but I'm not feeling stuck or adrift anymore. Instead, for the first time, I feel like I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be.

**Beth Gawne**

# MARCH 27, 2022

## The Redbud

*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.*

Matthew 6: 28b 29 NRSV

When I lived in another city, every day on my way to work I passed a redbud tree. This particular tree was severely damaged from a devastating ice storm in January 2007. It was a large, mature tree with a spreading form, but after the storm, all of the large limbs had been broken by ice, and were cut back almost to the trunk. That first year, there was only one skimpy, small flowering branch visible on the maimed tree when spring finally came.

A few years later, however, the gnarled skeleton of that old tree was covered with slender, long, new branches and shoots that almost, but not quite, hid the stumps of the old tree limbs. But every year, when spring comes, it is clothed in extravagant and joyous beauty. I am thankful for the wisdom of the landowner who patiently pruned but didn't cut down a tree that seemed almost beyond hope in the midst of winter.

### **Prayer:**

*Ever-loving, ever-creative God, you not only keep us alive in the midst of the things that hurt and scar us, but give us joy and beauty and a sense of wonder in spite of our scars. Help us to trust that you are always at work, even in the midst of suffering or loss or pain, seeking to offer us new life and new possibilities, tree and human alike.*

**Diana Smith**

# MARCH 28, 2022

## A Snowdrop Blooms

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*

Isaiah 18-19 KJV

*The delicate, beautiful snowdrop, often the first flowers to emerge from the snow in late winter, has long been a symbol of hope and renewal.*

PetalRepublic.com

After 18 long months of pandemic separation, that first opportunity to be together with distant family was thrilling. We were chatting and watching as our daughter artfully arranged a salad. Suddenly she burst into tears. "I'm so happy you are here," she sobbed, pouring out her longing to have us "witness" the wonderful life she has.

Her words filled me with joy then pierced a dark emotional reservoir that I had not realized was there. For decades before my mom's passing, I had tried to overlook her lack of presence in my adult life. She gave so generously of herself in many ways. But her being with me was the one thing I desperately wanted. It was the one thing she was unable to give.

Over the years, I tried to understand why. I rationalized, blamed and shamed myself for being unworthy of her attention. The small injuries of her never seeing a granddaughter's dance performance, important swim meet or graduation accumulated and festered. The memory unleashed repressed anger that roiled my soul for weeks. Until, after much lamenting, the hurt gave way. My taking every opportunity to "witness" for those I love is my healing balm.

The gardener in me sees hurtful memories as winter soil. It can stifle our growth. Or, as snowdrops prove each year, it can be an icy chill we travel through in order to bloom.

### **Prayer:**

*God, help me let go, forgive, and live in the hope of what can be.*

**Joanne Steller**

# MARCH 29, 2022

## Slain in Hope

*Why do I put myself in jeopardy and take my life in my hands?  
Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my  
ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for  
no godless person would dare come before him!*

Job 13:14-16 NIV

Most everyone knows the story of Job—how God allowed his life to quickly turn upside down and he lost most everything. Sometimes we forget that through all this heartache and loss, Job never sinned. Even when his friends encouraged him to curse God and die. Instead, Job offers lament, hope and faith. “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

Through the isolation of the pandemic, we can feel like someone, maybe even God, is slaying us—preventing us from living life as we want to live it, feeling alone, and sometimes, if we are honest, in despair. I know I’ve felt that way. I told a friend that 2021 felt like a “groundhog year” in some ways – just repeating the disappointment of 2020.

With the story of Job, we are reminded that Job always had hope and trust in God. God restored everything to Job and then some.

This pandemic will come to an end someday soon and God will provide for us and deliver us. We will be stronger on the other side, renewed.

**John Godshalk**

# MARCH 30, 2022

## The Gift of 6:23 in A Pandemic Desert

*I am creating something new. There it is! Do you see it? I have put roads in deserts,  
streams in thirsty lands.*

Isaiah 43:19 CEV

Vibrations buzzzzzz disturbing my restless sleep. I ignore them briefly. A bohemian melody crescendos. The buzzing surrenders to the song – louder and louder. Their task complete, I tap the screen of my phone, awakened. The oppression of a never-ending pandemic is still with me. I go to bed with it. I wake up with it. In this pandemic desert, stress seems a never retreating reality.

A dashboard of daily cases, deaths, hospitalizations, and infection rates pops up on my phone. My anxiety escalates. The hoped-for-vaccines have arrived only to be thwarted by political divides. Masks – an inconvenient truth – provoke fist fights, airline brawls, and gubernatorial executive orders.

Pandemic-incited crime rages in urban centers. The double-barreled munition of COVID-19 and gun violence leaves many families wailing. I awaken each morning at 5 a.m. to the CRY. Rachel still weeps for her children.

There it is! Do you see it? A new road! God pairs me with an old friend in a new way. Together, exactly at 6:23 am, we sing gospels, reflect on Scripture, and find Hope's highway for the day. God's Spirit propels our journey. HOPE assures God's revelation of enough new road in this desert for the day.

We journey this pandemic desert making stops along the way. We visit justice. We converse with community. We laugh. We cry. We repent of times we thought God had looked away. Each morning, just before sunrise, the light of Christ breaks in at 6:23.

We end with prayer, *"In this desert, thank God for a new road of HOPE named 6:23."*

**Reverend R. Lois Artis**



# MARCH 31, 2022

## The Joy of Community

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV

*We have to take refuge in our sangha, our community of practice.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

I have been a Methodist from birth but had never had an ongoing involvement in a small group. I went to church primarily for the sermons and the music—not the relationships. My husband and I started attending Foundry in 2016 and quickly realized how special it is and it felt like our new church home.

Eventually, we decided that it would be nice to get to know some other Foundry folks beyond the “Sunday pew greeting” opportunities, so we joined the Arlington/Alexandria small group.

For a while we were able to meet in person, but soon after the pandemic got serious, we shifted to Zoom meetings.

Now, two years later, our group feels like a real community of friends who have our faith in common. We have 12 “regulars”—the perfect Wesleyan number! We have had serious discussions on sacred resistance, racial justice, and partnering against hate, and have each shared our own spiritual journeys. We recounted micro-aggressions and reminded ourselves to look for and do “micro-compassions.” We are gradually learning more about each others’ families, personal histories, joys, doubts, and fears. We’ve shed our guardedness about sharing personal thoughts and feelings, and shed some tears.

The group is something new that has been born and flourished as a true community, supporting each other through these challenging times.

### **Prayer:**

*May our small groups continue to thrive into our future together.*

**Lynn Smarte**

# APRIL 1, 2022

## Vehicles of Hope

Hope can keep us alive if we don't see the cracks in our lives as losses. In fact, how can these cracks lead us to reform our lives into new and positive practices?

I love sending and receiving Christmas cards. Through them, I alert friends to my life and learn about theirs. This year I was both puzzled and curious to receive a card from a formerly close co-worker from whom I hadn't heard in over 15 years. She wrote that she has Stage IV cancer but is staying positive throughout treatment. She enclosed her phone number.

During our first call, we talked about our families, church lives, and physical problems. I happened to glance at a large plant in my living room, a gift from this person 17 years ago when my dog died. She replied that she was using the china bowl I gave her for her wedding years ago. I thought of her each time I saw the plant. She thought of me when she served meals. In fact, we had been in each other's minds all this time. Now we could expand our friendship during these difficult times and renew our connection over the phone.

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Because my own health restricts how many ways of helping others, the phone is essential to me now. The large crack of this health problem can be addressed by staying in touch through calls, renewed connection fostered over time.

New practices, like keeping in touch in any way possible, overcome limitations as vehicles of hope. Jesus modeled this truth by varying his actions throughout his life, even through death on a cross. Easter reminds us that God is with us always and that we can be present for one another through multiple ways.

**Barbara Cambridge**

## APRIL 2, 2022

# Faith in the Wilderness

After a prolonged period of being in the job search wilderness, I recently found a job. Praise God! And yet the journey was filled with floods of anxiety and self-doubt, fires of frustration and disappointment.

One job interview process illustrates these feelings. In August, I made it to the final interview rounds for a job I really wanted. I was filled with hope. However, I did not get the job. A friend of mine told me that “God was protecting me.” Protecting me???!! I didn’t need protection – I needed a job!

It turns out she was right. The job was below my skill level and the better job ultimately came along. Through all these challenging times, one thing that kept me going was this stirring that the work I pursued made me feel alive.

I am reminded of the spiritual message that holds my faith together: God is “endlessly compassionate, unfailingly safe and [wholly] protective.”

**Wil Rumble**

# APRIL 3, 2022

## Project Hope

*Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from God. Truly God is my rock and my salvation; God is my fortress, I will not be shaken.*

Psalm 62:5-6 NIV

My relationship with hope has been tumultuous and ever changing! As a young adult, hope was a part of my DNA. Fifty years ago, I was brimming with hope. My optimism embraced my new family, new job, new home, vibrant church, and an America ready to address the country's social ills following the death of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Absolutely nothing could change my enthusiasm for life, upward trajectory, and hopes for tomorrow. The nation was changing and I was seeking my place in it.

I realize now that my ego was caught up in the exuberance of youthful dreams. I thought America had figured out the tragic consequences of racism, sexism, and hubris. However, today, we live in a democracy that doesn't work, a pandemic that kills, intense weather due to global warming, and separation from our spiritual connections that leave us wanting. I had hoped to make the world a better place for future generations only to see the walls of justice come a tumblin' down over the past six years. How do we find courage to hope?

The scriptural framework in Psalm 62 reminds me not to place my trust in individuals but to hold out my hand for the solid rock. Life is scary and unpredictable. People and processes disappoint. Human nature waivers along the arc of justice. I pray for hopefulness that the next generation will treasure a better understanding of God's unconditional love and a path toward more permanent justice.

### **Prayer:**

*Lord, may your 'rock solid' strength give us hope through the storms of life.  
Amen.*

**Paula Blair**

# APRIL 4, 2022

## Acts of Kindness

My wife, Lynn, and I felt a calling to start a “new thing” during the pandemic. We are doing small acts of kindness as much as we can, and it helps us keep the faith and gives us hope.

So far, we gave crutches that have been in our attic for years to a soldier who couldn't afford to buy ones that fit her. We give unhoused people gift cards to McDonald's. We ask neighbors and friends if we can get them anything at the grocery store. We visit a friend who can't go outside. We always use the checkout lane at the grocery where Theresa is working, make sure to ask how she's doing, and chat a bit.

It's like we're a non-profit, except we don't file paperwork with the state, raise money from others, or identify specific populations or needs in a mission statement. This idea grew in part from Sharon Salzberg's advice to “do the good that's in front of you.”

One of our favorite experiences took place in a grocery store. The checkout clerk said she loved the picture on a box of note cards that we purchased. After loading our groceries in the car, we went back into the store, bought another box of the cards and gave them to her. She was surprised and really pleased. On our way out we heard her telling her coworkers what a nice thing a customer did for her.

We're still in training to get better at seeing opportunities for acts of kindness.

I hesitated for a microsecond to submit this because some might think we're bragging. But, it's not like that at all. In a small, personal, immediate way, we're just doing a little evangelism. I wish we had started years ago.

**Doug Smarte**

# APRIL 5, 2022

## Obon

"For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

Isaiah 43:19 NLT

Every year in Japan, there are a few days where they honor those who passed away. The days are filled with memorial services, festivities, and times of reflection on the lives of those gone before. This festival is called Obon and it serves to connect the present with the past.

The last few years have been very hard for us to get through. I have lost an older sister to COVID. I know others who lost loved ones to the pandemic and are struggling to survive in this new normal. We are often beset by our problems and don't keep connected with God in the way we should. It's said that tough times don't last always, but if one wants to savor what Our Lord declares to the prophet Isaiah about a new beginning, it's appropriate to recall and reflect on the lives and legacies of those who are no longer with us.

The last day of the festival features the releasing of lanterns into the water. The lanterns symbolize the people who are no longer living. If I had to create an Obon lantern, I would do it for my late sisters Irene Thomas-Gresham, Omelia Thomas-Little (who died from COVID), as well as my parents. Honoring their memories keeps me grounded and in a state of peace.

### **Prayer:**

*Father, in memory of those who departed to Your Rest, may their memories be blessed, and may we draw strength from this. Amen.*

**Serge Thomas**



# APRIL 6, 2022

## Between a Rock and A Hard Place

Monday 9 a.m.: Text from CEO/Owner: "Urgent, need to talk." The call, "We've been hit by another pandemic-related situation that impacts our cash flow. We need to close the company."

Monday 10 a.m.: COO brain kicks in: High-task, detailed, deadline-driven plan given to management team.

Thursday 5:30 a.m. Working on devotional, and I turn to Isaiah: "Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands." Isaiah 43:19, The Message

Thursday 5:35 a.m.: Re-reading the letter my mother left for me before she passed, "Never stop being the kind, caring, loving, and generous person. Be there for others, especially when they don't have a voice."

Thursday 9:30 p.m.: What-would-Jesus-do-brain kicks in. Management team meeting. How will we show compassion, care, and love? What about the staff member who has a child who attempted suicide, the one hospitalized with COVID, the one having surgery, and the one with the H1B visa who only has 60 days to get employment?

Following Friday 7 p.m.: Text message from staff member laid off that day, "Just checking in to see if you're okay. Thank you for believing in me, giving me hope, and inspiring me to be my best."

In the time of pandemic, the heart of a servant leader is so needed – showing compassion, care, love, integrity, grace – at a time when folks are asking, "Is there hope?" It's offering the promise of "something brand-new...bursting out."

### **Prayer:**

*God, remind me when there's a rock in the road that it is not a dead-end but a detour that may lead to a better place than where I was heading. Amen.*

# APRIL 7, 2022

## Bloom Where You Are Planted

Every Sunday, Pastor Ginger offers in her welcome, “No matter what you believe, or doubt...” Several years ago, this phrase hit me like a ton of bricks as permission to arrive at church on Sunday, even with all my doubts. At times, they loom large, following me like a raincloud. At other times, I’ve kept them at bay, feeling more confident in myself and what I’m doing.

As the pandemic hit, my doubts hit sky-high levels, wondering what kind of God would allow for this massive, global suffering. Last winter, it seemed like COVID was everywhere, and maybe, God was nowhere. I felt I was grasping a very tiny rail, in the cold, damp darkness of winter, just holding out hope for light. But finally, a late February day hit 58 degrees, and I walked around the Tidal Basin and marveled at the sunshine bouncing off the water. Days seemed brighter, I received my first COVID shot, and then I gave my first hug in five months. I enjoyed spring more than I ever had before. I breathed a little easier.

When recently asked the question, “How is God’s love manifesting in your life?” I was shocked to discover that I – as an introvert – had written a list of 10 experiences from the previous months with other people. My doubts about God began to lessen last year, as I rediscovered simple joys easily forgotten in the pain of the winter and isolation. Flowers bloomed again, I felt the sun set on my face from Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park, my friends had babies, and we came back to church in person. Today, I have new gratitude for the beautiful life popping up around me and I’m holding out hope for spring, once again.

**Parker Low**

# APRIL 8, 2022

## Why Now?

"I don't want to be married to your father anymore. I want a divorce."

Those words, spoken on January 6th by my 82-year-old mother hit me like a ton of bricks. How could this be happening? Now, after my parents had celebrated their 56th wedding anniversary last June. Now, after my father had been admitted to the psychiatric ward of a local hospital on January 1st and diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Now, after I found out that, after teaching online for almost two years from my parent's home in Wisconsin, I had to go back to Washington, DC by January 30 to return to in-person classes. How could this be happening? And now?

I looked at my mom and said the first words that came to my mind, "Let's calm down and not make any hasty decisions. We will get through this. If God brings us to it, He will bring us through it."

When life becomes confusing, and dare I say chaotic, as it often does, remember that if God brings you to it, He will bring you through it. Never lose hope. God never fails and everything will work out in the end. Because it always does.

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

Isaiah 43:2 NIV

**Jill Neuendorf**

# APRIL 9, 2022

## Trust and Obey

*But we also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint.*

Romans 5: 3-5 NASB

Pandemic challenges persist. The news is painful to watch, listen to, or read. A lot of fear is conveyed. Where can I find hope to persevere?

Looking back to previous rough times, I remember my mom saying, "Joe, it is a great life, if you do not weaken." Her words hold weight with me because I know that life was hard for her growing up dirt poor in a western Pennsylvania mining town. My genealogy research only helps me appreciate her more as I discover aspects of her life that she never talked about.

What my mom lived and shared freely was her trust and faith in God. One of her favorite hymns was "Trust and Obey" (UMH 467). A phrase in the second verse is "not a grief or a loss; not a frown or a cross, but is blessed if we trust and obey."

At some point in her spiritual journey, my mom came to know that everything that happens to you, whether "good" or "bad," has the purpose of becoming closer with God. God is in all things.

So, should I live in fear? Or, as the passage from Romans 5 suggests, live in hope? My choice is to walk with the Lord as exemplified by my mom. Seeing God in all things helps me to press on. Typically, I discover an unexpected truth to live better by. God is drawing me closer.

### **Prayer:**

*God, help me trust and surrender completely to You. May I "be happy always, pray constantly, and be thankful in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18 NAB). Amen.*

**Joe Steller**

# PALM SUNDAY | APRIL 10, 2022

## God, on the Other Side

Is that God I see on the other side of pain?  
This burning passion, this need for love I can't explain  
Why I'm called to witness, but can I truly trust this vision?  
Such deep iniquities: my view was dark, I barely listened.

So is that glow I see now on the other side of living, a human victory,  
Where all transgressions are forgiven,  
And though I stumble on to that brightest star,  
Is He the peace I seek, to find just who I am on the other side?

Is that God I see?  
(For I have stoned my share of temples),  
Is that Truth I see?  
(And I may have sworn on holy ground),  
Is that Faith I see?  
(He's had to vie for my attention),  
Is that Love I see?  
(Will He have no cause to hang around?)

Is that God I see on the other side of fear, inviting liberty,  
When life is hard, and we can't hear how unforgettable  
Is the great rebirth of hope,  
Will you consider this — there's a perfect gift we all have dreamed of?

Is that God out there on the other side of night,  
Our self compassion, to show us wrong, to tell us right?  
And though we stumble on to that brightest star,  
Be still and find just who you are, find just who you are on the other side.

**Audrey Miller Hallett**

# APRIL 11, 2022

## Kindred Travelers

*Do not be afraid for I am with you.*

Isaiah 43:5 NIV

Hope springs eternal and its light shines from many sources. I reflected on these thoughts as I was invited to take a closer look at James Tissot's painting "Journey of the Magi," during a Writing Salon class. I felt immediately mesmerized by the central figures: three fiercely determined Wise Men on camels wearing vibrant orange and yellow robes, paused. Behind them a trailing caravan of weary travelers plodding past majestically rising, sun splashed mountains, their pebbly path disappearing between mountain peaks.

I studied the traveler's weary faces. I questioned their motives for beginning this long, challenging journey, knowing little about their fellow travelers, placing complete faith in their guides, yet not knowing what the future held. Where would they eat, sleep, or seek shelter along the way?

I felt their journey mirrored my own life during the pandemic. With strong faith, I began this journey, facing challenges of survival at every turn: food scarcity, learning curves and job survival, travel restrictions, and difficult personal choices. I learned to reach out to others. And, like the Lenten journey I am currently on, my hope and faith will be strengthened by the joy of Easter morning.

Glory be to God.

**Diane Seeger**



# APRIL 12, 2022

## Jesus Calling on the Pandemic Line

*Hush! Hush, Somebody's callin' my name! Somebody's calling my name! Sounds like Jesus.*

Negro Spiritual

I don't know how Jesus sounds in a pandemic. Perhaps, the labels I have become during the pandemic might prevent Jesus from knowing my "real" name. Perhaps the noise of the pandemic might prevent me from hearing.

If Jesus is calling, do I answer to the vaccinated, the boosted, or the unvaccinated? Do I answer to the cloth masked, the paper masked, the double masked, or the N-95 masked? Will Jesus know where to find me since we are not in a church building? Jesus and Elvis left the building. Maybe Jesus is calling you and me out of buildings. Will Jesus call me as I lay in bed watching church online? Maybe Jesus will call as Amazon Prime, FedEx, or UPS drop off a package. What happens if porch pirates think the call is for them? Will I miss my Jesus call? Oops! I forgot Jesus knows me by name, not labels.

I recall times Jesus called in the past. He called me to justice work in the early 60's during the Jim Crow epidemic as I was baptized at Jackson Chapel First Baptist Missionary Church, known for its activism. Arthritis and Jesus called me during the Covid pandemic. I answered both times. In 2021, I combined contemplative photography, walking, and storytelling to create inspirational posts online called "God Moments."

Jesus knows my name and will keep calling. A pandemic is a minor event for Jesus who specializes in releasing us from bondages. I will answer my next Jesus call and say yes.

*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.*  
Isaiah 43: 1

**Catherine Hargrove**

# APRIL 13, 2022

## Where Do I Go?

In her book, *Intimate Conversations with the Divine*, Caroline Myss states that “there is a gravity field of chaos generated by all the changes happening in the world.” These words resonate deeply with me. If I were to choose one word to describe the last couple of years, it would definitely be chaotic. I thrive on predictability, order, a sense of security, but these years of the pandemic have left me somewhat disoriented. My natural adaptability has been stretched to breaking point.

The words of the prophet Isaiah are a welcome spiritual resource for me. Isaiah reminds me that I belong to God and that my Creator is present in my challenges. Isaiah also cautions me not to give in to fear or fall into the temptation of looking back with nostalgia at the past. If I do, I will miss the new opportunities to serve that may come my way or the good things that are happening – even in the midst of chaos.

Spiritual disciplines equip me to live in hope. Scripture reminds me that I am deeply loved, that my Creator will provide for my needs, and that I am already gifted for the task at hand. Prayer and reflection provide insight as to direction from God. Now is the time for me to pray for faithfulness and boldly engage in God’s ongoing renewal of the world. The task does not call for easy solutions to appease my conscience but, rather, it calls me to the disciplined life of daily examining whether I am living in alignment with God’s intentions. In my case, this means also seeking and celebrating the many ways God is healing our world through the commitment of people of faith everywhere.

**Josiane Blackman**

# MAUNDY THURSDAY | APRIL 14, 2022

## The Power of Love

My memory is not so good these days but I remember many things from that day two years ago. I remember him singing. I remember the rapt attention of those listening in the sanctuary. I remember the applause. I do not remember the song he sang or the pastor's sermon. Yet, I do remember one word from the sermon: beloved. Pastor Ginger called the man who stood and sang beloved and I knew she really, really meant it.

There was a palpable feeling as he walked down the church aisle at the conclusion of the service. In my Forrest Gump-like ignorance, I saw a rock star walking the red carpet. I remember everyone wanting to reach out to him, make eye contact with him, touch him as he walked down the aisle. Many people were waiting to talk to him. It was then I learned he didn't have much longer to live; probably days or weeks not months or years.

My thoughts drifted to the dying man who carried his own cross upon whom our faith is based. "What is it, Jesus, about death that causes us to love so much more expressively when we know it's near? What is it that pierces our hearts so we can effortlessly let go of petty grievances and silly worries?" In that instant, lyrics from a Huey Lewis song filled my head. My question had been answered. It was "The Power of Love."

I witnessed the power of God's love shining upon John Harden that Sunday in February two years ago. It radiated from each of you who cared for and loved him. Do you remember that day? I hope I never forget that day when God reminded me love is far more powerful than death.

**Suzie Colbert**

# GOOD FRIDAY | APRIL 15, 2022

## Gateways

After 70 years in Babylon, they were desperate for hope, back-to-normal, business-as-usual.

After 2 years of COVID, we are also desperate for hope, back-to-normal, business-as-usual. Back-to-normal sounds so inviting, but could we do better?

As we approach Easter, where the pain, suffering, and sacrifice of Good Friday was our gateway to hope, life, and resurrection, let us consider how the lessons we learn during the pandemic might also serve as a gateway for hope, rebirth— to better love God, each other, and change the world.

Last year we lost my aunt Jeannie to COVID. Eulogies are great, but how to better love and not take one another for granted while we are living?

I spend most of my time safely working remotely in the comfort of my home, but not everyone. Do I take for granted all the amazing front-line workers who keep the world running- including nurses, teachers, law enforcement, and so many more?

Another day, another variant. How can we better manage access to life-saving vaccines all around the world? Does "America/Me First" really work?

As Easter people we know our final destination is a place far above it all, but at the same time numerous pandemics devastate the world over the centuries. How do we bridge the daunting gap between the now and the not yet?

### **Prayer:**

*Dear friends,*

*We may not have all the answers, but there is a Shepherd.*

*The night is long, but stars are provided.*

*The terrain, unforgiving, but the Shepherd, rock-steady.*

*May we keep the faith and follow. We are in good hands.*

*To love, learn, laugh, cry, and follow through the wilderness, pandemics, hurricanes, homophobia, racism and all.*

*From Friday into Sunday. We are on our way.*

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...*

Psalm 23 ESV

**Chris Hong**

# HOLY SATURDAY | APRIL 16, 2022

## The Gift of Inner Solitude

I am the poster child for the extreme extrovert on the Myers-Briggs Personality Test. When we were first quarantined in March 2020, I was not in a good place. To paraphrase Dr. Seuss in *Green Eggs and Ham*, I can not, will not, be in solitude. Not in a house, not with a mouse. I do not like forced solitude, Sam-I-Am.

I was lucky enough to have Dave, my husband, at home, but felt I could not overuse or abuse our relationship. I did not find Zoom, phone calls, or emails as satisfying as face-to-face communication.

And then I felt this still, small voice inside of me:

Don't worry. I'm here.

You are valuable.

I want a richer relationship with you.

I love you, and you don't have to do anything to earn that love.

Just be here and try to be quiet.

All right. I have plenty of time for quality quiet time. No time like the present.

God has given me the gift of inner solitude for the past two years. Real, interior solitude. Quiet, even in downtown DC. The traffic sounds have become like the sound of ocean waves. Honking horns are like geese flying over the sea. I have felt the beautiful, inner stillness and restfulness of being alone with God. I am even thankful for sirens because they tell me that someone in need is getting care.

Thomas Merton says that when we empty ourselves, we can better give to others. That when we are more alone with God, we can be more with others.

May it be so.

**Ella Cleveland**

# EASTER SUNDAY | APRIL 17, 2022

## Sunshine and Stormy Skies

Growing up in the south where intense summer thunderstorms are quickly followed by brilliant sunshine and stunning sunsets, I see hope in nature's transitions.

Finding the ability to hold storms and sunlight in balance is made possible for me by a realization that divine messages of comfort, warning, or inspiration are often evident in the world – natural and human – around us.

Last summer, we were staying at a high-point out West from which we could see for miles. One evening, we found ourselves presented with a stunning panorama. On the left a bolt of lightning pierced dark skies; on the right a full rainbow showered brilliant sunshine on the land below.

Catching the lightning and the rainbow in a photo, I shared it with a Foundry friend, who immediately saw the meaning in the message: "This is life. This is hope. This is faith."

Our faith gives us the ability to hold the darkness and the light at once, to hold both the pain and grief of Good Friday and the joy and happiness of Easter. And we Easter people tilt toward hope.

In the space separating the darkness and the sunshine, I can see the shadowy promise of the rainbow, of hope. As human beings, we can fully experience the lightning bolts of pain and the dark clouds of grief. But as people of faith, we know that love will shine through.

**Elder Witt Wellborn**

# EASTER MONDAY | APRIL 18, 2022

## Got Hope?

*The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge; He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

Psalm 18:2 NIV

Death, sores, and losses  
Friends' endless inquisition  
Job clings to hope

A fiery furnace  
An irrational ruler  
Divine hope prevails

The unnamed woman  
Reaches to touch His garment  
Hope transmits healing

The Master slumbers  
While his disciples panic  
and hope stays the course

### **Prayer:**

*Dear Lord, help us to remain steadfast and confident in the hope and love you have for us regardless of the tempests, pandemics, and the daily challenges that we are called to endure during our earthly journey, and to always know that we are yours.*

**Cheryl Gibbs**

# Healing

In the early days of the pandemic: Offices, factories and schools shut down. Traffic vanished from the roads. Traveling ceased, and nature reemerged from hiding. Smog-filled skies cleared. Litter-filled beaches became more welcoming to nesting animals. This inadvertent Sabbath resulting from the reduction in human activity allowed nature to take a breath.

Healing comes when we don't expect it.

What are the current challenges we face that find us in need of a new vision? Your next phase could be something you haven't imagined; a new perspective; a door made visible that was there all along. Seek and you will find. Originality and creativity are the fingerprints of God.

**Prayer:**

*God, help us stop striving to dominate and control others, and instead, consider the well-being of others and ourselves with renewed empathy and love. Show us the way to a new, unimagined spiritual awakening!*

**Paul Keefer**

# Caring

I learned about giving care at age 19 when I became a full-time caregiver to my mother. God's trustworthiness showed up at this time. As a follower of Christ, I trusted God to show me what to do next. God's care revealed itself then and throughout the years by sending people, kindness, rest, peace, and joy in good times and in tough times.

Today, we may not know what to do as we care for ourselves, our children, our elders, and our responsibilities in this world. We can trust that God sees us and cares for us as we take each faithful step. God's care may not look the way we thought it would. Trust in God will allow us to see it.

**Prayer:**

*God, my strength and shield, help me walk each day in trust that you love and care for me.*

**Rev. Dr. Kelly L. Grimes**

**Associate Pastor**

**Director of Hospitality and Congregational Care**



