

# St. Andrew's Hall

## 2023 Lenten Devotion Guide





St. Andrew's Hall

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## Message from the Dean

*“God, the Maker of the world, is manifested to us in Scripture, and his true character expounded, so as to save us from wandering up and down, as in a labyrinth, in search of some doubtful deity.”*

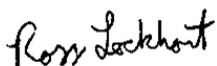
- John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion I (IV), 65.*

Growing up on the Canadian Prairies, I always enjoyed the end of summer treat of visiting a labyrinth in a corn field. One entered the maze, planted carefully by a farmer in the spring now grown to full height, turning this way and that trying to find your way to the centre, and then desperately seeking a way out. Our brief and blessed journey through this human life can feel a bit like a walk through that sun-kissed labyrinth of corn – exhilarating and exhausting at the same time. John Calvin’s teaching that God’s Word is given to us as a guide and light to our journey from baptism to life’s end is good news indeed.

As you turn the pages of this year’s Saint Andrew’s Hall Lenten study guide, I pray that the daily reading of scripture and the prayerful reflections of members of our community will strengthen and encourage you on the journey of discipleship. Feel free to share this guide with members of your family, church, and broader community. The practice of daily scripture reading and prayer is a key action for those of us apprenticed to Jesus, seeking to live as his hands and feet in the world. Our work and witness as disciples of the risen Lord Jesus is one that is best shared with others, for the journey is long and the road can be winding. Even if you read this devotional booklet on your own, every time you access this resource know that others across North America are reading these same words daily, praying these prayers, and reflecting on the goodness of God in our midst. During this season of Lent, Christians around the world set aside time to reflect on the significance of God sending Jesus to share life with us, to show us God’s heart for this broken yet beautiful world. From the cradle at Christmas to the cross of Good Friday to the empty tomb of Easter Sunday, we sense the deep and world transforming action of God’s reconciling and redeeming love for us, and the whole world.

Thank you for joining with us at St. Andrew’s Hall throughout this Lenten season in 2023. St. Andrew’s Hall, as a college of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, has been a gospel witness on the University of British Columbia campus since 1955. The Lord has given us a vision that we are called to discern and equip the future church that God is bringing. As a result, St. Andrew’s Hall educates and equips missional leaders through teaching, hospitality, and witness for Christ’s church of tomorrow, today.

Let us begin this journey together, trusting that we are not entering a dark and foreboding labyrinth, rather with the light of God’s Word, we are being led closer to Jesus, the one who shows us the path of life, and the way home.



*The Reverend* **Ross A. Lockhart**, PhD, Dean of St. Andrew’s Hall

Ash Wednesday, February 22

**Joel 2:1-2, 12-17**

*“Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm...” (2:1)*

*“Blow the trumpet in Zion: sanctify a fast...” (2:15)*

In line after line of his lament, the prophet Joel bemoans the distress in which God’s people, his “Zion,” find themselves. Their faithlessness will now lead to massive suffering, to defeat and loss of their holy land, to the judgment of the day of the Lord. The trumpet of warning must sound and be responded to.

But Joel has more than one theme to expound in his oracle of alarm and judgment. The prophet can also articulate the promise which is never finally withdrawn from God’s chosen people. Even in the deepest rebellion Israel can hear Joel’s plea: “Blow the trumpet”: “sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people...!” Repentance is possible. The oracle of doom can be transformed into the song of God’s gracious victory.

Lent is the season of preparation for the events of Holy Week, Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension. As the horror of the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus unfolds, the trumpet sound of forgiveness, promise, and new life is heard ever more triumphantly. “Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning: rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing” (2:12-13).

*Loving God: As we enter this year into the season of Lent, open our spirits to the challenging and comforting message of the prophet Joel, so that we may learn with him how to sound the joyous trumpets of forgiving and renewing grace.*

**Darrell Guder** is emeritus professor of missional and ecumenical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. He is Senior Fellow in Residence at St. Andrew’s Hall.

Thursday, February 23

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

*But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven...  
for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

In this passage, Jesus focuses on three spiritual practices: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. His teaching is prefaced with a warning to beware. Jesus advises us to reflect on the condition of our hearts as we live out our call to be “the salt of the earth ... a light to the world” (5:13-14). Jesus calls us to be God-centred, not self-centred; to humbly carry out these practices with God’s glory and reputation in mind, not our own.

Jesus also shines a spotlight on the truth that our hearts follow what we treasure. Where we focus our time, money, relationships, possessions, and everyday pleasures shows God what and who we treasure. Jesus has nothing against treasure. If we hold our treasures loosely and use them to deepen our devotion to God, then we will have lasting treasure that no one can take from us.

Are your spiritual practices and treasures a hindrance or a way of deepening your communion with God? The season of Lent is a gift to help us get our hearts back in the right place with the One who is our greatest treasure and the giver of all good gifts.

*Gracious God, help us live with open hands, so that the treasures we have in this world, and indeed our very hearts, might also be with the Lord. Amen.*

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

Friday, February 24

**Psalm 51:1-17**

*“Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.  
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,”  
(Psalm 51:12-13)*

The book of Psalms helps us to pray when words fail us. Jesus used the Psalms on the cross when he felt cursed with his deepest loneliness. During Lent we are blessed to remember that we need God, we are broken, and we are sinners. The Psalms, with more than forty chapters of lament, can help us in this walking of sorrow but also clinging to the assurance of God's love.

Psalm 51 is a psalm of confession of sins, but it is also a missionary psalm. The poet asks for the recovery of joy that comes from God's salvation and recognizes the need for God who gives us and sustains in us with a *willing spirit*.

Humanistic philosophies want to recognize that everyone is nice and kind, but the gospel message reminds us that we are sinners and dependent on God's grace. This message gives us humility but also joy. The gospel gives us strength and empowers us for the mission of proclaiming repentance to sinners, who, like us, need God's grace to have eternal life.

*Lord, thank you for the joy of salvation, grant us perseverance to preach humbly and boldly your salvation in Christ alone*

**Afonso Issa** is a student in the MDiv program at Vancouver School of Theology, living at St. Andrew's Hall. He came with his wife Louinne and their four children from Brazil and is grateful for all the hospitality at St Andrew's Hall.

Saturday, February 25

## 2 Corinthians 5: 20b-6:10

*"We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known ... as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything."*

2 Corinthians 6

Over time I've grown to appreciate paradox. I used to think matters were either black or white, but there are limitations in the conjunction "or." The word "and" is more generous and helps us comprehend that we can be grieving and grateful; tender and tough; knowledgeable and ignorant. Paradox is a gift.

In 2 Corinthians 6:8-10, Paul models how to embrace the spaciousness of "and" and not to live under the tyranny of "or." As participants in the reconciling work of God in Christ, we are true to our word and yet distrusted; we are immersed in tears and yet submerged in deep joy; overlooked by the world and yet seen by God.

In my early 30s, I felt misunderstood by others. A spiritual director observed that Christ, too, suffered in ways that people couldn't comprehend, and so perhaps my experience of being misunderstood was an invitation from God to grow in my identification with, and conformity to, Jesus.

Christ himself inhabits paradox. He is the sinless one, and he became sin for us; he is the one who was alienated, and he makes reconciliation with God possible for us; he is the one who was despised and rejected, and he is the one who is highly exalted and accepted by God.

This Lent, I invite you to find beauty and hope in our mysterious and paradoxical journey with God, increasing your trust in the One who, in love, willingly faced death, and who raises the dead.

*Reconciling God, we don't want to receive your grace in vain. Help us to endure these trials with genuine love and patience, believing that you, Christ, both have walked this road before, and you are walking with us now. Amen.*

**Emily Mitchell** is Associate Pastor of Congregational Care and Formation at Calvin Presbyterian Church in Shoreline, WA (just outside Seattle). In addition, she's a spiritual director with Renewal Ministries Northwest. She was honored to be a St. Andrew's Hall Guder Scholar in 2022.

First Sunday of Lent, February 26

**Genesis 2:15-17, Genesis 3:1-7**

*“And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”*

There is a line Tolkien wrote in *The Fellowship of the Ring* that has always stuck with me. “The wide world is all around you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out.”

In Genesis 2, God gives Adam and Eve a command that contains two parts; “You are free to,” and “You must not...” Yet, when we read these lines, we tend to focus quickly on the scarcity of the command and forget about the promise found within it. The promise says, “You can eat from every single one of these trees that bear fruit. God is good. Creation is full of life.” Instead, we focus on the command preventing us from doing the one thing we want, eating from that single tree. Suddenly, we’re all two years old again and want that red ball our sibling has.

At the heart of the command is the invitation to trust that God is acting in a way that has humanity’s best at heart; freedom and fullness of life, while also acknowledging boundaries that help prevent death. It’s an invitation to see the whole world that *is* around you and *was* created with you in mind—full of life. It’s an invitation to see and trust the goodness of God in the land of the living.

*Creating God, help us to see the goodness that is all around us, regardless of situation or circumstance, help us be grateful for your presence with us. Amen.*

**Grant Vissers** is married to Konnie, has two daughters, and serves as Lead Pastor at Knox Church, Waterdown. Grant was a 2022 Guder Scholar participating in the August program through the Centre for Missional Leadership. You can find him on social media and YouTube @grantvissers.



Monday, February 27

### Psalm 32

*Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,  
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.*

The season of Lent calls us to reflect on our own shortcomings and then to turn to God as we seek forgiveness for any harm we have done. The psalmist describes the impact of carrying around the weight of our own transgressions. We waste away and groan all day long, silencing the still small voice that beckons us to seek forgiveness and receive deliverance. We often choose to bury our cares in the business of our lives rather than unearth them at the foot of the cross.

One of the residents at the care home where I work started taking care of the many plants that line our windowsills. I complimented him on what a great job he was doing and asked what his secret was. "It's simple," he said, "never let anything build up in the soil because it has nowhere to go. Eventually you are going to harm the plant."

Lent is the time to let go of all the things that have built up in our hearts, which prevent us from receiving the peace and joy that God offers us so generously. Psalm 32 begins and ends with a message of joy, and we have great reason to be glad and to rejoice. Our transgressions are forgiven, and our sin has been covered by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

*Lord, we seek forgiveness for any harm we have caused and turn to you for guidance as we release the burdens of our sins and embrace the peace and joy that you offers us.*

**Shirley Carleton** is student at Vancouver School of Theology enrolled in the Master of Divinity program. She is a Certified Candidate from the Presbytery of Westminster and looks forward to graduation and ordination as a Presbyterian minister later this year.

Tuesday, February 28

### **Romans 5: 12-19**

*For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (v.15)*

This past semester, I wrestled with the idea of sin and salvation. Augustine's doctrine of original sin explains that it was all Adam and Eve's fault. Ever since, humanity has reaped the consequences of disobedience and kickstarted the search for the One who will save humankind. The search committee went through judges, prophets, and kings to find the One worthy and a whole bunch of sacrifices.

Fast-forward to the New Testament and born in innocence is Jesus. This Jesus is the One who is worthy. Spoiler alert: Jesus dies, conquers sin, hell and the grave and extends the invitation of eternal life to us. Jesus wins the battle and sometimes it doesn't click. Jesus WON. As I read this passage, I realize the systematic struggle of humankind. Even today, sin is so prevalent. We disobey God with thoughts, actions, desire, and hardness of hearts. However, we have the opportunity to exchange this heart of stone for a new heart where Jesus may dwell within. This season as you reflect on sin and salvation, leading up to the cross, I would like you to deeply reflect on your actions to reflect the worthiness of Jesus. It may be sharing the Gospel, it may be sharing life with those we find hard to be with, or it may be a realignment with God through prayer. I think Jesus is worthy and I would like to invite YOU to respond to His worthiness.

*King Jesus, this season I remember your work on the cross. Thank you for your grace and truth that you have brought into this world. I pray that I may reflect your image, so that others may also want to follow You. Jesus, you are worthy, and I love you. Amen.*

**Joe Ragbir** grew up in Montreal and moved to Beautiful British Columbia in September 2022. He is currently pursuing his MDiv at VST and living in St. Andrew's Hall. Joe is a Certified Candidate for Ministry from Montreal Presbytery. Joe has found much joy working in youth ministry at Tenth Church and building stronger friendships within the community.

Wednesday, March 1

### **Matthew 4:1-11**

*“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil... Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.”*

It would be much easier to skip over the details of this passage, even preferable, as we attempt to avoid the truth that each and every one of us will be tempted at certain times in our lives, especially when things are going well for us. When we are feeling confident in our calling, maybe a little too confident, something unexpected happens and we are shaken by it. The reason for not sparing us the details of Jesus' temptations, is to show us in all his humanity how he dealt with them so we can follow his example.

Jesus has just experienced what he would most likely describe as the ultimate high with his water baptism by John, the Holy Spirit descending on him and the Father's spoken word and stamp of approval. In that moment Jesus knew the calling on his life and God's plan for his ministry. And so, his journey began only to find himself in the wilderness, a season of dryness, hunger, and most likely questions. This was a time of testing for sure.

We should not be surprised that as we begin our journey of ministry, we will go through times like these as well. Some of us may find the wilderness with its testing too difficult to bear and be tempted to give up. Some of us may want to take matters into our own hands to speed up the process. We may even look for shortcuts that can lead us astray... further away from our calling, our ministry, and our destination. The key is to trust God with our journey and especially God's timing, knowing that we will be made stronger in the process. If we persevere through the wilderness, there are rewards waiting for us. We will be hydrated and nourished. We will surely know that God was with us as we feel God's presence and we will have a testimony to help others through their wilderness and time of testing. And we, along with the angels will sing God's praises.

*Almighty God, we thank you for times of testing as you walk with us through the wilderness. We have the desire to live out your plan for our lives as we serve you and those around us, but we need your help. We know you are with us and ask for the strength and patience to persevere. Amen.*

**Patricia St. James Smith** is a student at VST working on her M.Div. She lives in the Garden of Eden, Nova Scotia and wears many hats including pulpit supply at a nearby Presbyterian Church, as well as a part-time clinical dietitian in a long-term care facility. Patricia joins the St. Andrew's Hall community for worship every Tuesday online linking students coast to coast.

Thursday, March 2

**Isaiah 42:1-9**

*“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight...”*

*“See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”*

The excitement and passion that Isaiah embeds in these verses reaches our ears, 2,800 years after he received them from God and wrote them down. Rejoice! The Lord God wants you and me and everyone to know that his Servant is coming to establish justice on earth. Certainly in 2023 we need to remember that in the midst of a European War, a waning global pandemic and the suffering from awful climate related events, that his servant the Lord Jesus Christ is in our midst and cares about those who are hurting.

Because of Jesus' strength, his faithfulness and his love of justice, we can face each day with renewed hope. We have a God who is not hidden thousands of light years away from us, remote and uncaring. Isaiah reminds us that God has called us, takes hold of our hand, and each day God gives us exactly the grace we need to get through each day. Isaiah also reminds us that we are not just to receive blessings and grace from God, we, as disciples of Jesus, in turn are called to emulate God's chosen servant.

A great secret that is hidden in plain sight is this: As we give to those in need, as we pray for those in need of healing, and where we are gracious to those around us in need of grace, we become Isaiah's Servant.

*Lord, be with me this day. Take my hand, especially when the going gets tough. Amen.*

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

Friday, March 3

### Hebrew 9:11-15

*“For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance...”*

When the best comes, the lesser will fade away. I remember years ago watching TV with my grandmother in Indonesia. She had a giant tube TV with grayscale images on it. Today, stores sell flat screen TVs with incredible resolution. Only an antique collector would that old tube TV as the rest of us reach for the latest technology. When the best comes, the lesser will fade away.

The Hebrew writer applies the same truth in comparing the animal sacrifice and what Jesus had done to redeem human sins. The Hebrew writer says, "For if the blood of goats and bulls, ... *sanctify for the purification* of the flesh." Without discrediting the importance of animal sacrifice for the Israelites, the writer says that the sacrificial system worked as God's means to sanctify the people in that time. However, the sacrifice of bulls and goats can't handle the problem of sins to its root (Heb. 10:3-4). For the perfect one is yet to come.

What is perfection, and when would that come? It is Christ who entered the holy places to sacrifice himself to secure eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). *Christ is the priest who at the same time is the sacrifice himself.* As the priest, Christ can be our mediator before God. And, as the Lord who sacrificed himself, Christ is the perfect sacrifice that can resolve the problem of human sins once and forever. Hence, in Christ, we may receive the promised eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15).

Christ, the perfect priest and sacrifice, is our mediator before God. This truth reminds us that we can always come to God in prayer and ask forgiveness. That is God's greatest gift to the world, the reconciliation between God and the world in Christ Jesus.

*Thank you, Lord, for the ransom of sin that Christ did on the cross as the perfect mediator, priest, and sacrifice. So, we can be in a good and clean relationship before You. Amen.*

**Rio Susanto** is a second-year student in MATS program at Vancouver School of Theology. He serves the Indonesian community in Vancouver and joins the VST Presbyterian students in worship and fellowship at St. Andrew's Hall.

Saturday, March 4

**Job 14:1-14**

*If someone dies, will they live again?*

We are all going to die. We just try to ignore it but sometimes you can't. You're in hospital. They are going to stop the faulty beating of your heart and start it again with an electrical shock. They say, "The odds of anything going wrong are very small, but just in case..." Before they put you to sleep, you say a prayer, "Forgive my sins and receive me to yourself. Look after my wife and my family." Just in case.

It worked. But someday, the heart, that bundle of muscles, valves, and electrical impulses, will actually stop. Yours also. We try to ignore it. But on that operating table, or in the middle of the night on a hospital bed, you can't ignore it.

Now, you could read Job 14. "But mortals die and are laid low; humans expire, and where are they? ... mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep." Or you could listen when they mark your forehead with ashes and say, "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return."

Job 14 is actually a prayer, and the heart of the prayer is a question: "If mortals die, will they live again?" From this side of Easter we know the answer is "Yes." But we may not recognize the magnificence of that "Yes" if we haven't also sat in the darkness with Job.

*Lord Jesus, help us to see and know our mortality, that we might lean deeper into your arms of grace. Amen.*

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

Second Sunday of Lent, March 5

**Genesis 12: 1-4a**

*“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”*

This passage is a declaration of God’s assurance as he sends Abram out into the unknown. Abram is instructed to take a risk, and that if he does, he will be protected by God. “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God is emphasizing that he is on Abram’s side, and that he’ll always be there.

What God is saying is enormous – how could Abram possibly fail, with this kind of support! But I can’t help thinking about the fact that God needed to say it. Even the founder of Israel needed reassurance – and so will we. The paradox of our journey is that the world is both full of uncertainty and full of God’s assurance. Can we see it?

God will be with us every step of the way, and yet, we must do the work ourselves, in partnership with God. Some might ask, “Is God kind of invisible?” Perhaps, the trick is to simply trust that God is there.

Perhaps we can’t force ourselves to trust, but as we read this passage of Scripture, we can feel the power of the words: “you will be a blessing.”

*Dear God, may we feel Abram’s blessing as we go along our paths. May we trust our callings, and trust that the support we need will appear. Amen.*

**William Burr** is a student in the M.Div program at the Vancouver School of Theology and a member of Knox Presbyterian Church, Ottawa.

Monday, March 6

## Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
where does my help come from?*

Living forty-five minutes away from the majestic Rockies most of my life, I “lift my eyes up” daily and feel reassured by the solid ever-present peaks that fill my panorama. Even better, I can go for a hike in hills to restore perspective and sense God’s presence. However, Psalm 121 is not about hills but about the answer to the opening question which reminds us of who our sovereign God is, and how he cares for us.

I hunch over my computer in disbelief- the ransomware attack has wiped my machine clean- no files, emails, nor calendar. I reach for my cell phone which I drop. Staring at the ground, I realize it isn’t working either. I am flustered and tense: what can I do? What should I do? I finally stop fretting for a moment and lift my eyes. My problems almost look like mountains- what was that psalm? Lord, help me shift my focus to You.

“Remember”, comes a nudge, “help comes from the Lord”. While I may frantically dial my technician’s number, I really need to pause and listen for God’s voice first. After all, he is all-powerful, endless creative and is watching over me every minute of my day. This knowledge calms me, and I realize this computer thing is a passing glitch that will be forgotten before long. The phone rings- my technician can come- but in many ways the bigger problems of fear and worry and stress have been resolved. Like David, I have realized once again, the true source of my help and I am filled with gratitude.

*Lord, remind me always to lift up my eyes to You. Amen.*

**Mary Rosza De Coquet** is a Ruler Elder at Grace Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alberta and a member of the St. Andrew’s Hall Board.



Tuesday, March 7

**Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**

*As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations."*

Paul is very aware of the growing tension between Gentile and Jewish believers in the first century church in Rome. Believers from a Jewish background repeatedly upheld the Old Testament scriptures and believed that Jewish law was still in force. They used Abraham as an example of justification by works.

Paul, however, holds Abraham up instead as a shining example of righteousness by faith. Paul makes the point in our passage that Abraham kept no law, rendered no service, and performed no ritual (i.e. circumcision) that earned credit to his account before God. Instead, it was Abraham's belief and faith in God that allowed him to receive the covenantal promises offered by God. It was not earned, but sheer gift!

What a promise this is to us! We receive the gift of God, not based on works, but on faith. Not based on biology but based on faith. Not based on ethnicity or geography, but on faith. Faith in Jesus.

Who are you? I'm Canadian. I'm Chinese. I'm a father, a husband, a son, a pastor - but more than anything else, I am a son of Abraham. I am a follower of Jesus.

*God, thank you for the gift of Jesus. May we relish in our identity as your chosen children. Amen.*

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

Wednesday, March 8

### John 3:1-17

*Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and said,  
"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God...  
Jesus replied, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God  
unless they are born again." (John 3:3,4)*

Are you willing to be changed? In Nicodemus, we have a wealthy, well-educated and strict religious man. He opens his conversation with Jesus by saying, "we know that you have come from God." I would love to ask Nicodemus is how do you know and what do you mean by "you have come from God?" Nicodemus probably meant that Jesus was a trusted teacher or maybe a prophet like those of Israel's past. But the reality was that he indeed did *not* know. John teaches us that Jesus was the Word in the beginning with God and that he became flesh to dwell among us (John 1:1; 14). However, Jesus does not argue Nicodemus's knowledge but instead challenges him "to be born from above." The Greek word "*another*" is an adverb of place, and the regular usage of it would have led John's audience to understand it as such. What Jesus tells Nicodemus is that his status and knowledge are of little help if he wants to "see" the Kingdom of God. In the Gospels, "to see" is usually a metaphor for understanding. Nicodemus needs to open his heart and imagination to let God make him a new creation to see the Kingdom. In other words, to see the Kingdom is not about what you know, **but if you are willing to be changed.**

Today, many assume that knowledge takes priority over experience. That was Nicodemus' issue. However, for Jesus, knowledge is not enough because his Gospel is about *life*. Jesus indicates that Nicodemus will not be able to see the Kingdom unless he experiences this radical change that comes from above. For us, Jesus leaves a question hanging in this story, "are you willing to be changed?"

*Father, let your Spirit give us a humble heart in this Lenten season. Regardless of our knowledge, academic degrees, and religious status, may your Spirit transform our hearts to have a life that honours you and blesses others in your name. Amen.*

**Daniel Martinez** is a recent Presbyterian VST grad and minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Duncan on Vancouver Island.

Thursday, March 9

**Matthew 17:1-9**

*“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him.”*

Someone asked, “What’s your favourite part of ministry?”

For sure, it’s the Sacrament of Baptism.

The babies are precious, the parents full of hope, and the congregation is delighted. But my favourite part is when I say to the congregation, “Remember your baptism and give thanks.”

Remember that you are a beloved child of God, called, blessed, and assured of the grace, love, and communion of God, no matter what. With the baby in my arms having just received the sign of the promises of God, I see the faces of those who need to be reminded that they have received them, too. In the middle of the tumble of life and faith... remember your baptism. Remember the steadfast promises of God for you *now*.

The story of the Transfiguration happens in the middle the Gospel of Matthew. The glory and mystery of God in Christ is revealed and the words from the cloud ring a bell... “this is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased: listen to him.” They are the words spoken at Jesus’ baptism. They are a reminder that the promises of God are not just at the beginning of our journey when things are fresh and new. We know the promises of God in the midst of life when pressure is mounting, when the future is unclear, when suffering is at hand, just as it was for Jesus.

God comes to us in the midst of our lives reminding us to trust and listen to Jesus.

*Covenanting God, help us to remember our baptism and give us the faith to trust that you always keep your promises. AMEN.*

**Jean Morris** lives in Calgary and serves on the Board of St. Andrew’s Hall and the Board of Vancouver School of Theology.

Friday, March 10

**Psalm 40:5-10**

*"I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,  
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation"*

In this psalm of David, he boldly and freely declares God's glad news of deliverance. Yet, like the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, we know there are times in life when we struggle to joyfully proclaim God's wonderful deeds. There are times when we cannot see past our own situation and our hearts are restrained from praise; only our cries escape our lips. In these times may we learn to wait patiently on the Lord, sustained by the hope that God draws near and listens to us with an open ear.

For the times when we have sunk down deep into the pit,  
may we patiently wait, knowing that there will be a time when we will sing a new song of praise.

For the times when we feel like we have fallen short and hide ourselves away,  
may we remember God's plans which have been laid within our hearts.

For the times when we cannot see a way out,  
may our hearts be lovingly drawn back into God's love and delight.

For the times when we attempt to earn God's love through sacrifice and praise,  
may we be reminded God only desires us, just as we are.

For the times when we have failed to speak, keeping our lips sealed,  
may we rejoin the chorus to loudly proclaim God's faithfulness and salvation.

*Breathe Prayer*

*Inhale: I wait for the Lord*

*Exhale: God listens and grows near.*

**Andrea Perrett** is an Associate for New Witnessing Communities with the Centre for Missional Leadership at St Andrew's Hall.

Saturday, March 11

**Luke 1:26-38**

*The angel went to her and said,*

*“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”*

“But dad, you promised!” As my daughter looked up at me with tears welling in her eyes, I recall being washed over by a fear that she would never trust or hope in anything again. Could it be that I’d tarnished beyond repair her beautiful heart and its capacity to follow those she loved for all time. (It’s possible I was being a tad overdramatic!).

But the point remains, we will let people down, and people will let us down too. It is a difficult reality of this broken world, which makes Mary’s statement of trust in Luke 1 such a bold reminder of how amazing our God is.

For a young woman who had no doubt experienced her fair share of disappointment to utter the words, **“May it happen to me just as you said it would,”** says far more about God than some special quality Mary possessed.

It isn’t that God’s promises are more believable, or that the timeline seems more probable. In fact, it can usually be quite the opposite! No, it’s that the one speaking is *trustworthy* beyond compare.

*Lord, as we journey through Lent together, we ask that you provide us with face-to-face moments with you. May these moments remind us of your majesty, power, grace, love and promises that would leave us entirely trusting in your good and perfect will for our lives just as Mary did, so long ago. Amen.*

**Alex Douglas** is the lead pastor and co-replanter of the Family Church of Heritage Green - an unapologetically family focused church in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Since the church’s relaunch in the summer of 2014 Alex has used his storytelling, artistic talents, and humour to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with families of all shapes and sizes across their community. Alex and his wife Kathryn live in Upper Stoney Creek with their 4 amazing kids - Sarah, Rebecca, Thomas and Emily.

Third Sunday of Lent, March 12

### **Exodus 17:1-7**

*Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people?"*

Before liberation, these Israelite families faced years of repeated exposure to abuse, violence, and trauma as their thriving population was perceived as a tremendous threat. In response, Yahweh vigilantly coordinated a sacred, human-centred deliverance, one marshalled by Moses under God's divine benevolence.

Though a strong and resilient people, on this journey they were displaced, unsettled refugees in upheaval. This broken community was bone-weary and with the blistering, stony terrain steadily punctuating their emaciated frames, their devout energy was fast expiring. It is normal for people under these conditions to panic and God bless Moses for providing a safe container, one secure enough for them to ferociously voice their rage and despair without repercussion. He walked alongside them in prayer and reassurance. Now far enough away from their oppressors, they could openly wail and through this action begin the overdue process of healing.

Our confidence in God is restored, and the testing and quarreling does eventually cease once we land safely at our destination. However, first we must get there and lamentably, there are no pathways from trauma to redemption, that are not arduous and unrelenting. Said another way, the odyssey to salvation is no picnic.

Our faith is realized and strengthened time and again, only through the wraparound, cyclical nature of our individual and intergenerational attention to passion narratives. With God's shield, our willful steadfastness, and authentic relationships, we exceed suffering. Since time immemorial and forevermore, we have been and are encircled by the basileia/reign of God.

*Lord, water is life, be with us during times of adversity and uprooting, move us through sun-scorched lands, towards well-watered gardens, we ask for your blessings on us who are thirsty. Amen.*

**Natika Bock** is a Presbyterian MDiv student enrolled at Vancouver School of Theology and a member of Trinity Presbyterian Church in New Westminster. Natika lives on the unceded, ancestral territory of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within Secwepemcúl'ecw (Kamloops, BC).

Monday, March 13

**Psalm 95**

*“Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.”*

This past December I had the privilege to sit and enjoy a beautiful Christmas Service full of joyous song and music at St. Andrew’s Hall. Residents and friends enthusiastically shared their talents as we gathered to reflect on the real meaning of the holiday. I felt truly uplifted and reenergized afterward.

It is not always easy to follow the prompt given us in this psalm. There are times when life drains even the strongest Christian of energy, and entering God’s presence is done with heavy, slow, steps rather than happy upbeat songs of worship. The psalm provides wonderful guidance to such weary believers: we are reminded of some of God’s amazing attributes. He is our refuge, our creator and the one who sustains us. Our lack of enthusiasm or emotion does not reflect the measure of His love for us. The psalm directs our focus to God’s mercy and invites us to hear His voice and find His rest.

We learn in Hebrews that God’s rest is more than a temporary moment of peace. It includes eternal salvation. This amazing gift is ours through faith in that babe of Bethlehem. What source of strength and true joy it is, not only at Christmas, but all through the year!

*God, help us to kneel before you with thankful hearts and help us to joyfully share the good news of your rest with other weary travelers. Amen.*

**Silva Kraal** is a resident and Community Coordinator at St. Andrew’s Hall.

Tuesday, March 14

### **Romans 5:1-11**

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.*

When I first started studying in Canada, I used to go to the library early in the morning and come back late in the evening. Due to my poor English skills, I needed a lot of time to complete challenging assignments. Moreover, I had to write sermons for my church every week. After spending all day at the library with books and a laptop, I would go home, and my kids and wife always welcomed me. During a short break after dinner, I helped the children get ready for bed. After they fell asleep, I sat at my desk again to finish whatever work was leftover.

After completing my master's studies, my wife began working. So, I took over much of the duties around the house. However, housework was more challenging than I thought! Besides, I realized that caring for children is much more difficult than earning a master's degree. One day, I suddenly had a strong sense of gratitude for my wife, because I realized that thanks to my wife's sacrifice, I was able to study and prepare sermons peacefully in the library the entire day.

The reason we can live in peace on earth, sing of the beauty of God, rejoice in the resurrection of the Lord, and have fellowship with others by sharing love and grace, is because Jesus Christ, our King and Saviour, sacrifices for us on the cross. I bless you today as you to remember the sacrifice of our Lord and rejoice in it.

*Dear Jesus, I pray we remember your sacrifice this day on our Lenten journey and to allow us to enjoy your peace.*

**Chanil Lee** is a youth pastor at Disciple Methodist Church and Taiwanese Presbyterian Church. Chanil lives with his family at St. Andrew's Hall and is studying in the VST/Durham Ph.D. program, focusing on Homiletics.



Wednesday, March 15

**John 4: 5-42**

*“Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town...”*

The encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well is one of the best-known stories in the Bible. The woman came to the well to draw water in the burning heat of mid-day a time when she knew no one else will be around.

She was surprised to see a man, a Jew, sitting at the well and became very suspicious when he spoke to her, because Jews do not associate with Samaritans. He asked her for a drink, she countered that they should not be talking to each other. He offered her living water, she countered that was not possible since he had no obvious means of drawing water from the deep well. He ignored her comment and said his living water will satisfy her thirst. She humored him saying, ok, give me this water.

Jesus countered by focusing on her deep vulnerability, her shame, her not having succeeded with five previous husbands. He was saying ‘I know the real you, others see you as an outcast, but you are worthy, and I am not ashamed to be seen with you.’

She, feeling uncomfortable, changed the topic to a theological debate about the true place of worship. Jesus countered by saying God desires sincere worship from our heart. The woman said “whatever” when the Messiah comes—he will explain everything. He said, “I am he”! In that one defining moment, she acted, leaving behind her water jar, her link to Jacob’s well, and her shame, and went to tell the good news to the people who shunned her. Wow!

At this time of Lent, let us also act, giving up the temporal things that hold us back and drink the living water provided by the One who truly knows us.

*Lord, help me to see that only you can truly know me and satisfy my soul. Amen*

**Victor Ling** is an elder at Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church and a cancer researcher. He serves on the Board of Saint Andrew’s Hall.

Thursday, March 16

### 1 Peter 4:1-8

*The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. <sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

As a young boy raised in the Roman Catholic tradition, my earliest memories of church life had nothing to do with attending mass or singing chants. Rather, I remember the church hall's kitchen and the business with which my Oma and the other church ladies, dutifully prepared many a luncheon and dinner for the congregants and community of St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Particularly, I remember the desserts for Christmas and Holy Week that she would let me help her prepare alongside her. She knew, as I would later reflect, the ordinary grace and joy, that hospitality such as this brings into the hearts of both the giver and the receiver. The kitchen, perhaps next to the sanctuary, was a way into the heart of the community of God, and under her careful watch, the freezer and fridge were always full to greet the unknown masses with a coffee and a pastry.

No one knows the day or the hour that the Lord will turn up on our doorsteps. We know not when the Spirit of the Creator's Christ will return, but we do know that we are called by Peter, in this Bible passage, to practice Christo-centric love of ourselves, others, and with God, that acts as witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to prepare ourselves for the return of the Messiah.

How are we preparing our hearts for the in-breaking kingdom of God, and the second coming of Christ? Are our hearts full of offerings of praise and thanksgiving? Do we live lives that are marked by the gifts of the Spirit? How are we living our faith right up to the moment that we find Christ knocking at the door?

*Maranatha, Maranatha, Maranatha; Come Lord Jesus, transform our hearts, bodies, souls and minds to receive and reflect the gift of your life, death, and resurrection. Amen.*

**Benjamin MacRae** is currently a second-year Master of Divinity student at Vancouver School of Theology and a resident of St. Andrew's Hall, as well as a candidate for ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Ben's ministerial passion is in the intersection of music, Christian spiritual traditions, ecumenical and interfaith dialogues, social activism, and evangelism amongst those in the first third of life. He currently works as minister of youth and young adults at St. Andrew's-Wesley United Church.

Friday, March 17

## Psalm 70

*May those who long for your saving help always say,  
"The Lord is great!" Psalm 70:4*

If you have not read the stirring five-verse prayer of petition in Psalm 70, here is a recap. A troubled soul asks God to quickly give them aid. Certain people out to find fault with the writer put him in social and physical peril, even threatening death. His initial language hints at feelings of oppression, fear, and even spite since each grievance comes with an accusatory wish for his foes. As you can see, we are not the first generation to wrestle with social anxiety or the harmful, often toxic opinions of others.

Now, some souls might get stuck on verses two and three, perhaps spending prayer time adding to the petition. I will admit to sometimes being one of these souls. Yet, let us turn away from rehashing past and present anguish and continue to verse four, where we encounter a sharp and vital turning point.

Here, the focus shifts away from the gloom and danger of earthly troubles. A woeful tone becomes one of praise, and somber meditation is replaced by the action of seeking God and proclaiming God's goodness. Shifting into this new activity means there will be less time to ponder our grievances or feed our fear of other people's opinions. As this time of Lent concludes, will you shift from rumination into action with the Psalmist and get busy seeking God and proclaiming God's goodness?

*O Lord, our deliverer, thank you for hearing our list of woes and wishes. Send your Holy Spirit to move us past our fear and interpersonal striving. Enliven us to enthusiastically seek You and proclaim to all that "The Lord is great." Amen*

**Ally McCombs** is a wife, mother, Presbyterian VST Master of Divinity student, singer, knitter, and friend. She lives in Shoreline, Washington, with her husband, Paul their thirteen-year-old son Andre.

Saturday, March 18

## Hebrews 9:11-15

*“Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant...”*

When you hear the phrase “Out with the old and in with the new,” what emotions rise up within you? Perhaps you let out a groan of frustration or maybe you gave a hearty “Amen.” Certainly, it is a phrase that some assume is capital “T” truth (especially in the context of technology - if you don’t update your device’s operating system you’ll be left behind).

Though the author of Hebrews talks of a *new covenant* (v. 15), it is not the same “new” that we hear today. This *new covenant* was mentioned previously by the prophet Jeremiah. It marked God’s promise to bring wholeness to His People. He declares that there won’t be a need for debates or teachings on who God is (discussing all the scriptural queries and theological rabbit trails) because *everyone will know God!*

Before, God’s People relied on the Levitical sacrifices which cleansed their outer being (v. 13). But God longs to cleanse the *whole* person. Through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and His own blood shed, we witness what the entire sacrificial system was anticipating. Jesus’ death on the cross was the last sacrifice that would ever need to be lifted up and would cleanse people not only on the outside, but the inside as well.

Jesus makes a way for us to be *whole* because this was God’s Will from the beginning.

*Gracious Jesus, this Lent help us enter into the wholeness (shalom) You offer. For You alone can fulfill such a promise. Amen.*

**Curtis Wilson** is an alumnus of St. Andrew’s Hall & Vancouver School of Theology. He is co-pastoring with his wife Elaine at St. Giles’ Presbyterian Church in Prince George, BC.

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 19

**1 Samuel 16:1-13**

*People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*

These words come at God's rejection of King Saul, the mighty man, and the unexpected divine anointing of Jesse's youngest son, David. While David was "glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features", these were not the reasons God chose him for this leadership role.

Throughout history, we have so often looked to the mighty, strong man (and yes, it too often has been a man) to lead us through times of social or political instability. In this regard, recent examples in nations of the global South and North have had some rather disastrous consequences.

It is not only nations that default to this practice; many organizations, including churches, look for the "mighty strong man", in times of uncertainty. And God knows, we are in a time of uncertainty as churches during this post-pandemic, post-Christendom age. In turn, that makes me wonder about the church:

*I wonder* if this time of uncertainty among churches calls for God's eye for leadership. What if we 'anointed' the lay person who has a passion for loving their neighborhood and an uncanny ability to mobilize others towards this end?

*I wonder* if the church should be looking to anoint those in the marketplace, government and non-profits who aren't self-promoting but are effective in their fields. What if we had them share their calling on a Sunday and gathered around them to pray blessing upon their lives in these contexts so that they may have even greater courage to seek God's upside-down kingdom?

*I wonder* if we should have a keener eye open for women, BIPOC folks or people outside the "most beautiful" lists who demonstrate a heart for God and God's renewing work in the world. What if we were to tap them on the shoulder as communities of faith and say, "Get the training and formation that will help you serve in your vocation as God's image bearer. We want to support you and stand with you."

As Christendom fades and churches formed for that period of history struggle to maintain the levels of membership and money needed for that model, we will need to relearn how to be the church in new ways. If this is going to happen, we will need to look for unexpected leaders.

*Lord, open my eyes to someone unexpected who you are calling into leadership that I might affirm and confirm them. And if you are calling me, help me to take up my cross and follow you. Amen.*

**Tim Dickau** is an associate at the Center for Missional Leadership, the director of Citygate and the author of *Forming Christian Communities in a Secular Age* (Tyndale Academic Press, 2021).

Monday, March 20

## Psalm 23

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

Psalm 23 is perhaps the most well known and most loved of all the Psalms. It is the one that many of us learned and memorized as children. It is a Psalm often read at funerals.

There is power in the words “the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Close your eyes and slowly say “the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.”

How incredible that the love of the shepherd causes us to want after nothing.

The verses and the words of Psalm 23 tells of a God who looks after his people like an attentive and caring shepherd looks after his sheep: a God who goes ahead of us, seeking and saving the lost sheep, and who guides us – if we will receive his guidance — a God who will put himself out for us; indeed who will even give his life for us, so that we may find safety and live.

The good shepherd knows his sheep by name and the sheep know the voice of the shepherd. Listen to the shepherd calling you by name, calling you to come to him. Keep your ears peeled for his voice which will draw you straight to him.

Celebrate the love of the good shepherd and find that when the Lord is your shepherd you will want after nothing.

*Loving God thank you for being the shepherd we all need and that with you, we are not in need or want of anything. Amen*

**Meridyth Robertson** is a 1995 graduate of Vancouver School of Theology. She is in the twenty-seventh year of team ministry with her husband Gavin at First Presbyterian Church in Trail, BC.

Tuesday, March 21

### **Ephesians 5:8-14**

*'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'*"

There is a phrase "the darker the night, the brighter the stars" attributed to Fyodor Dostoevsky (although, possibly first spoken by Vasily Rosanov).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul brings forward an age-old metaphor, one with which the people of Ephesus would have been very familiar. Light dispels darkness. Paul indicates that they were once darkness (not just "in the dark" but actual "darkness") and now they have a choice to live differently – as children of light.

I recently traveled to Copan Ruinas, a small town in Honduras. Like many small towns in developing world countries, it had felt lost in the past. It had been a place where there were limited opportunities, no jobs, where families would break under the stresses of alcohol, addictions, and poverty. The night skies in Copan are very dark, as they would have been in Ephesus.

But something changed in the last decade in Copan. A group called UrbanPromise Honduras has built relationships with the children and youth of Copan, giving hope, joy, and faith. It has created jobs, it has taught youth how to lead, and most of all, the staff have shown unconditional love to the children. In the dark night of Copan, the youth have become shining stars. In the very darkest nights, the brilliance of starlight illuminates everything.

We face the same difficulties in our lives. We are tempted to return to our dark ways even when we have the promise and the privilege of living in the light. Choose to be illuminated by the light, from the inside out.

*Lord, let us know what pleases you and let us live as your children, children of light. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Neil Singh** is the Assistant (to the) Regional Manager of UrbanPromise International, and an independent consulting engineer. He serves on the Board of Saint Andrew's Hall, and is an elder at City Centre Church, Surrey, BC.

Wednesday, March 22

**John 9:1-41**

*“It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.”*

In the story of the man born blind, we see a teaching on faith and belonging delivered in a different and new way. Here, Jesus makes a bold and significant statement that sin is not the cause of this blind man’s infirmity, in answer to the disciple’s question.

As a human being, it is all too tempting to make negative judgments. We are best, however, not to speculate, but rather to perform acts of mercy and love, instead. To be less inquisitive and more practical, less for cracking doctrinal nuts, and more for bringing forth the healing for those who need it the most.

Jesus knew that healing this man on the Sabbath would bring opposition from the religious leaders who already wanted to silence and kill Him. Yet, His compassion for the man drove Him to do it anyway. The compassion to free the blind man from his suffering was powerful and profound.

We too are aware that not all suffering is caused by sin. But the blind man and his parents are surely accustomed to hearing that blindness is the result their sin. Each time they hear someone raise the connection between sin and suffering, they suffer a little more. However, in the end, Jesus provides something for the man born blind, something much more than sight. He provides for him the protection of his fold, the blessing of needed pasture, and the gift of abundant life.

*God, the Healer, give us the faith to trust that you will heal us and love us in Your wondrous way. Amen.*

**Nehemia Neuhisa** is in his second year of studies at Vancouver School of Theology and participates regularly in St. Andrew’s Hall worship on Tuesdays. Originally from Indonesia, Nehemia is enrolled in the Master of Arts in Theological Studies program. Recently, he began serving as Worship Coordinator at Dunwood Presbyterian Senior Housing, New Westminster, BC.



Thursday, March 23

### Isaiah 7:10-14

*Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."*

*But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."*

*Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*

King Ahaz is known for being the king of distrust. With two enemies bearing down on him, Aram and Israel, Ahaz turns to the superpower of Assyria for protection. Instead of leaning into the promise of God's steadfast provision, Ahaz follows his own plan.

Maybe he was consumed by fear. Maybe he was being a practically minded, savvy sort of king, maybe he was just impatient. Instead of taking God up on God's offer of a sign of encouragement and forbearance, Ahaz goes to the Assyrian Empire. Ask anything from highest heavens to the depths of Sheol, offers God. No thank you, says Ahaz.

And so, Isaiah speaks God's word of both salvation and judgement in the announcement of the coming Immanuel – God-with-us. In the long history of God's people there are the faithful and the impatient, but God's plan unfolds at God's pace.

It is unlikely Ahaz was very assured by the prospect of a future child to be born who would redeem the dynasty of David for the good of God's people. Imagine two enemy armies breathing down your neck. Ahaz probably wanted more immediate help. But he refused to ask. In the face of God's offer he said no.

Instead, he went with his own plan. In the end Ahaz turned further and further away from God. And still, God's plan came to pass. In Jesus Christ we meet Immanuel, God-with-us.

*Dear Jesus, help me in my impatience as I await the unfolding of your plan for my life. Encourage me day by day, by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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

Friday, March 24

### Psalm 45

*<sup>10</sup>Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear:  
Forget your people and your father's house.*

*<sup>11</sup>The King is enthralled by your beauty;  
Honor him, for he is your lord."*

This past Summer, after three years of covid restrictions, we were finally able to attend a much anticipated in-person wedding celebration for a dear friend's daughter. I love weddings! It is such a privilege to witness the beginning of a new life for two people in love. This also brings back precious memories of my own wedding thirty years ago as I promised to "love, cherish and obey" my future husband. Through the years, I learnt that this vow is easier said than done!

How does our earthly wedding compare with the much-alluded spiritual union between believers and Jesus Christ? When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, we become his bride. He is described in Psalm 45 as the most excellent of men, humble, trustworthy, righteous, chosen and anointed by God. Isn't it wonderful to be unconditionally loved and desired by him, the most holy and perfect one! Can we trust that Christ is the only one who can heal us, comfort us, and give us eternal joy and peace?

Verses 10 and 11 in this psalm entreat the bride to "pay careful attention, forget your people and your father's house" and to "honour him, for he is your Lord". It is in response to Jesus' sacrificial love for us that we surrender and submit our lives to him. However, despite Jesus complete faithfulness, oftentimes we let our doubts and fears rule our thoughts and actions instead of trusting him. We look to our spouses, children, parents, friends, pastors, teachers and even ourselves for fulfilment.

What are some of your worldly associations that you must "forget" to truly honour Jesus as Lord? Are you looking for someone to "complete" you?

*Lord Jesus, forgive me for clinging to things and relationships which keep me from trusting and worshipping you fully and faithfully. Thank you for your unending grace and unwavering love for me. Amen.*

**Mavis Ho** is Executive Assistant to the Dean of St. Andrew's Hall and a member of Fraserland Alliance church in Vancouver.

Saturday, March 25

### Hebrews 10:4-10

*“And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*

For several years I volunteered at my children’s school, helping grade one students who were struggling with reading. A student and I would go into the hall, make words with tiles, review a worksheet, and then read a book together.

Sometimes if I was lucky, I was present at the very moment when reading “clicked” for them. But mostly, we struggled along, the students often reluctant, putting letters together to make words, and words together to make sentences. But it was the time of the week when I knew I was doing God’s will.

Sometimes we think that following Jesus requires great sacrifices or dramatic evangelism (and sometimes it does), but mostly, following Jesus means saying, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.”

It is seeing a need before you, and then saying yes to the invitation to serve. For me, that meant volunteering in the classroom. For someone else, it might be showing up once a month at the food bank, or driving a senior to church, or hosting a conversation circle for new Canadians, or inviting an international student over for lunch after church.

It is the quiet everyday actions, one after another, where we are made holy.

*O God – help us to be open to your call, in the ordinary and everyday moment of life. May we answer your call and do your will. Amen.*

**The Rev. Theresa McDonald-Lee** is the co- Executive Director at Camp Kintail, the Presbyterian camp in southwestern Ontario. She is a graduate of VST and was glad to be the recent Pastor-In-Residence at St. Andrew’s Hall.

Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 26

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

*"I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry."*

Five years ago, as a student minister, I received an invaluable lesson on how the words we use to describe death matter.

In the midst of grieving people, I always found it difficult to find the right word or phrase to use: "Passed away"? "Moved on"? "Went to a better place"? None of these ever seemed right. One day, my mentor in ministry made it simple: say "death," say "died." Death isn't a dirty word. Death isn't an insensitive word. Death isn't an uncaring word, it is an honest word, and when people are grieving, when people are wrestling with God and the mystery of life and death, honesty counts for a lot.

How true. And to what lengths we go to avoid this truth.

I always thought it was interesting, how, in the most famous scene from the Book of Ezekiel, the *Valley of the Dry Bones*, the prophet employs a non-answer in response to God's question: "*He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord GOD, you know.'*" (Ezekiel 37: 3)

Why are we so shy, even before God, to call death what it is? Can dry bones live? Are the dead alive? Where have our dead ones gone? We will tie ourselves in knots to avoid speaking too bluntly about these things. To avoid answering with simple truth. But why, considering that we *have* the answer?

In Ezekiel, God raises, re-sinews, and fleshes the dry bones in order to show the prophet what he is about to do for captive Israel. This event is also a preview of the resurrection Jesus demonstrates at the end of the Gospel story; appearing to the disciples not as a ghost but as a body raised from the dead.

Even Doubting Thomas, the one who had to be offered Jesus' hand and side in order to believe, confirmed the Good News shown to us by the Messiah: the resurrection of the body ("...and the life everlasting. Amen").

*Dear Lord, during the season of Lent, help us hear Christ's invitation to consider what his life, his sacrifice, and his death mean for us and the world. This Lent, let us take up the challenge of speaking clearly: that though we die, we will be raised as He was raised. Amen.*

**Roberto DeSandoli** is a VST graduate, former resident of St. Andrew's Hall and Minister at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon.

Monday, March 27

## Psalm 130

*"My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning."*

How was last Boxing Day for you?

Originally, Boxing Day was celebrated to give gifts to the poor, but these days it's about taking advantage of the sales. Hence, why people line up early in the morning in the cold and darkness to be first to visit their favourite shops.

Similar to those who are waiting for what they need on Boxing Day, I also often find myself waiting for something. I wait for answers to prayers or directions I ask God for. Although I'm not sure exactly when my waiting will end, I've learned to wait expectantly.

In Psalm 130, the psalmist writes about his deep sadness when facing a situation that is as dark as night. In the midst of his troubles, he chose to believe in God and stand guard like a sentinel to announce the dawn's arrival, "my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning."

The hopeful expectation of God's faithfulness in dispelling the darkness has given the psalmist hope to persevere in the midst of his suffering. In spite of the fact that he has not yet been able to see the sun rise, he takes comfort in God's promises and holds onto them as a source of confidence.

Never lose heart, even if you feel as if it is the middle of the night. Dawn is breaking soon, either in this life or in the future . . . in heaven! As you wait for God's deliverance, keep watching and keep persevering. His loyalty never wavers.

*Prayer: Father, help me to remain faithful in this place of waiting. Help me to serve you and live for you even in this crossroad of my life. Help me to wait as long as it takes. Amen.*

**Astrid Melatunan** is a M.Div Student at Vancouver School of Theology. Originally from Indonesia, Astrid is an active member of the Presbyterian worship and fellowship at St. Andrew's Hall.

Tuesday, March 28

**Romans 8:5-11**

*“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life . . .”*

The Lenten Pilgrimage echoes life’s journey from first to final breath. Ash Wednesday sets us on that path by reminding us that we *“are dust, and to dust we shall return.”* We sojourn with the truth of our own mortality, we are reminded of Christ’s dying for our sins, and we celebrate the salvation promise of an empty tomb.

Lent anticipates the promise that Easter holds out for us, resurrection!

In Romans 8:6-11, we, the Church, are reminded that the resurrection life that Jesus holds out for us begins now, today! The Apostle Paul turns our attention towards how we are living and asks us to reflect on what ultimately governs our lives. In going back and forth between “The Flesh,” and “The Spirit,” we are invited to consider what is giving direction and purpose to our lives. What gives us life?

What is it that we are willing to die for?

And perhaps more importantly, what is it we are willing to live for?

God’s answer to both of those questions is revealed to us in the incarnation of Jesus. You are worth dying for, and because of that worth, God desires for us all to know salvation through Christ. God’s ultimate desire is for us to know life with God, in the here and now. In our Lenten pilgrimage, we are to come to terms with our own mortality, so that we might be opened up, fully, to all that God intends for us. Open to life in God, in this life, and in life everlasting.

*Let us pray: Loving God, you reveal to us that your love knows no bounds. As we journey through this season, reveal to us how we might live, and move, and have our being with You. Through your Spirit, may we receive life as we continue this journey called faith. In Christ, our Saviour’s name we pray, Amen!*

**Rev. Andrew Campbell** is the minister of St. James Presbyterian Church in Truro, Nova Scotia. Andrew is a former resident of St. Andrew’s Hall and graduate of Vancouver School of Theology. With his wife, Candace, and their children, Addison and Noah, Andrew is a lover of music and stories.

Wednesday, March 29

**John 11:1-45**

*“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”*

I have a bible that I've been using for “work” the past few years. I plan to give it to my oldest son one day. Verses are highlighted. In the margins are notes from me that might help him understand the text and my heart.

John 11:5 is underlined and circled for him, so he'll pay attention to it. Writing this after a long 2022, it occurs to me that I need to pay just as much attention to this simple verse telling us that Jesus loved these people.

John tells us that death, pain, loss, and confusion came into their lives but not because Jesus stopped loving them. It's the same for us, though at times we see the pain more than his love.

We are tempted to trust more in other things, in ourselves, as if we're not loved by Jesus and it's all up to us. I'm grateful for this Lenten season which calls us back to trust that he's been loving us this whole time.

This passage has Jesus showing that his love can look like: showing up, listening to our grief, kindling faith, sharing tears, getting furious at sin and death, calling our names, raising us up and bringing God's glory out of our hardest experiences.

Whatever we wish his love would be like, Jesus shows us what it actually is: all these things for starters and, above all, the cross.

*Loving God, by your power may we recognize, return to, and be led by your ever faithful and loving presence. Amen.*

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

Thursday, March 30

**Isaiah 50:4-9a**

*“Morning by morning he wakens—  
wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.”*

I recall a time when, while a student, I had just moved into an attic suite in an old East Vancouver house. I soon discovered the house was not a happy one. Below me was a noisy family who fought, seemingly at all hours. In the basement were a few middle-aged men who appeared to be struggling, in a variety of ways. When we passed on the sidewalk, they seldom met my gaze or returned my hello. On my third night in the house, I was woken by someone trying to get into my apartment with a key. I bolted out of bed and yelled, and they ran down the stairs and away. I felt unsafe and unwelcome.

I lay awake the rest of that night, fretting over my present predicament. In those days, I mostly thought I could do it all on my own, but eventually I turned to the Bible: to the Psalms, and to Isaiah 50:4. “The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears.” I listened for God and put my trust in Him, and I knew he was near. Slowly, anger over the indignities I felt I was suffering cooled, and compassion for my neighbours grew. I felt courage and almost scoffed at my earlier misgivings, knowing God was there for me all along.

Isaiah gives us an image of the life of Christ, yet to come; His strength and courage for us to emulate and to show to others. Once we open our ears and we listen, we can feel God’s hands upon our shoulders, guiding and supporting us. God is most assuredly with us, as if with a bond unbreakable, nurturing our resolve and determination as we face our struggles. Putting God before us, making him our foundation, our focus, our continual centre, we are fortified.

*Lord, help us to keep you at our centre, in all things; help us to move with righteousness through the challenges you place before us. Amen.*

**Christopher Orr**, Facilities Manager at St. Andrew’s Hall, enjoys exploring the outdoors and contemplating the wonders of Creation, with his wife Barbara and their boisterous mini-poodle, Pip.



Friday, March 31

**Psalm 31:9-16**

*"I have passed out of mind like one who is dead.  
I have become like a broken vessel."*

Pain.

We, as adamah, are made of the earth, a vessel filled with God's Holy Spirit. Crafted like clay on the potter's wheel by God. One can understand that a broken vessel is what God made us to be.

It is a pain that cannot be overlooked, as is the marrow of our being. Pain from the marrow can produce the blood that circles our bodies and causes our daily movements.

A blood infection spreads as silence is forced:

*"It'll all be fine."  
"You should smile more."  
"Don't worry about it."  
"It could be worse."  
"Don't be so negative."  
"Always look on the bright side!"  
"Everything happens for a reason."  
"Think happy thoughts!"*

Yet this Psalm reveals that pain is not a desired punishment by God nor a shameful cross to bear. To feel empathy, to be self-aware, and to acknowledge reality and want better is to lament.

Bob Dylan shares, "Behind every beautiful thing, there's some kind of pain." The Japanese have a trend of fixing breaks with gold called Kintsugi. The Quakers believe that the flaws are where God can shine through.

For as God shines God's love on you, it reflects on others where you think your vessel is broken. Your pain is 'not nothing.' You are not broken; you are beautiful and seeing God in a new light.

*Clay Maker, Potter and Water of life, be the marrow of our bones and guide our every action moving forward to a life of empathy for ourselves and others as we choose to live wholeheartedly in your world, discarding the cultural desire for a pain-free existence. Amen.*

**Jacqueline Cleland** is an M.Div. Student learning from St. Andrews Hall at the Vancouver School of Theology. She is a leader in Minecraft ministry and supporter of new and novel ways to connect to God.

Saturday, April 1

## Philippians 2:5-11

*“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”*

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, I was in business for myself, and always had a challenge when hiring employees. I wanted people who were reliable, motivated, and hard-working.

After becoming ordained as a minister, I worked for several years at a large Presbyterian retirement community. When looking to hire people for our staff, I wanted those who were able to display leadership, who were upbeat, confident, honest, and passionate.

In reading Paul's letter, I noticed that there are two words that were never considered in hiring employees for the business world: humility and servant.

And yet, these are important characteristics for our lives together in community. Christ emptied himself, Paul reminds us, and gave us the model of servanthood.

Paul's pastoral message for us as members of the Body of Christ is to have the same mind as Christ, and “look not to our own interests, but to the interests of others.” A little humility and a life of service will make a big difference!

*Dear Lord, give us grace to live out our calling as the followers of Christ, that we may have humble hearts and a desire to be servants in your kingdom. Amen.*

**Rev. Tom Summers** serves as Pastor of St. Andrew's Churches in Rose Bay and Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. When joining the Presbyterian Church in Canada from PC-USA, Tom completed his admissions coursework with Presbyterian faculty at VST. Now, in addition to serving two churches in Nova Scotia, Tom enjoys reading, travelling, and of course playing his fiddle!

Psalm Sunday, April 2

**Matthew 26:14-27:66**

*"Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"*

Today is Palm Sunday the beginning of Passion Week. Jesus' passion for us will be revealed. The humble king will suffer on the cross that will ultimately lead to resurrection.

I have more questions than answers at the story of betrayal by Judas.

I invite you to reflect and pray with me on these thoughts today:

- Jesus knew but he did not turn from his disciples.
- The deemed value of Jesus' life was 30 pieces of silver, a price of a slave.
- 'Surely' this is referring to the 'Judases' in the world and not me?
- They say everyone has their own 'price.' What might tempt me to betray my Lord?

Cowardice, fear, love of money, selfishness, rebellion...?

- There is no coming back from that!, we are tempted to assume.

Yet, Jesus' love is triumphant over the weakness of his disciples.

- Still yet, Jesus said to his disciples "Take and eat; this is my body...Drink from it, all of you."

A few years ago, a friend and minister from Vancouver shared his testimony of a period in his younger years when he hit absolute rock bottom. He ended up in prison fearing "there is no coming back from this." He said these words while sitting in his cell and all at once he remembered his Sunday School teachers' words, "Jesus loves you!"

The passion of Jesus is victorious if we let him be the strength in our brokenness and sinfulness!

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are worthy! Amen.*

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

Monday, April 3

**John 12:1-11**

*“You will always have the poor among you,  
but you will not always have me.” – John 11:8*

In the season of Lent, we prepare ourselves for Jesus' death and resurrection. In my own spiritual practice, prayer is central during this season.

My vocation involves nurturing, supporting, and walking alongside 'the poor' in Vancouver. It's fulfilling work, and it aligns with God's compassion for the vulnerable in Vancouver, but it is also draining.

As I'm writing this devotional, I'm waiting for a missing youth to return home; temperatures are below zero, and when last seen it looked like he was preparing to spend a couple nights sleeping in the park.

I've called every family member, each friend of his, and alerted the police – every box ticked and yet all unsuccessful – and all I can do is sit and wait. In the heartbreaking moments of longing for a loved one's return, I can't help but turn to God in prayer.

Embodying God's love to the poor and vulnerable – becoming the tangible expression of God's love in the crises of daily life – is only sustainable through our intimate access to God's overflowing love for the vulnerable.

In and through a relationship with Jesus, I've found myself formed in a rather unusual direction. As I contemplate the death of Christ, I'm reminded that despite the silent suffocation of trauma and injustice, God breathes resurrection life into the lungs of the broken. As I wait for the return of Jesus, I find in the longing for a loved one's return, God calls me to anticipate in hopeful expectation for when all things will be made right.

*Lord Jesus, in our waiting and our watching, may we know you that you are with us holding out the promise of your redeeming grace and abundant life. Amen.*

**Nate Hartley** is a recent VST graduate in the joint VST/Regent College MDiv program. Nate lived at St. Andrew's Hall throughout his theological studies. He is a certified candidate for ministry in the PCC and works for Inner Hope Youth Ministries in a variety of roles, including housing and life skills. When not in the library or at work, Nate enjoys running, playing hockey, and long chats over coffee.

Tuesday, April 4

## 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31

*“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,  
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*

It seems, does it not, that some things don't change! What was true in Old Testament times was similarly true in Paul's day and is also true today — humanity is drawn to its own 'wisdom', abandoning the true wisdom of God for a 'wisdom' that cannot help, transform, or save.

For Paul preaching in Corinth, the Gospel of Christ was being met with scepticism and ridicule. A crucified Saviour didn't make sense! The Jew's were scandalized at the very notion and the Gentiles demanded rhetorical argument; both were looking for 'proof'.

Today, the world is similarly sceptical! TikTok and other social media platforms are awash with voices casting doubt, demanding evidence, and offering alternate viewpoints and understandings. The wisdom of God, however, cuts through this dissonant noise and worldly chatter with the good news of the cross —how the steadfast love of an eternal God has been made manifest through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today, as in days past, the cross, which the world sees as foolish, offensive, and naive, remains for the believer the focus of our hope, and the truth by which we are saved.

*Loving God, draw us to yourself, and may your wisdom fill us with that sure and certain hope that comes with trusting Christ, our Saviour. Amen*

**Gavin Robertson** has recently retired after 23 years as a Chaplain in the Primary Reserves of the Canadian Armed Forces. He continues to work in team ministry with his wife Meridyth at First Presbyterian Church in Trail, British Columbia.

Wednesday, April 5

**Matthew 13: 44**

*When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*

Growing up in Winnipeg, I had a friend in the neighbourhood who liked to pretend he was a pirate. He dressed up in pirate gear, complete with the eye patch and hat, and when I would go over to his house for the day he often presented me with a hand drawn treasure map. Long before arriving at his home, my friend would go out into his backyard with his Dad's shovel and carefully bury "treasure" in certain spots. It could be a favourite stuffed animal or a matchbox car or even a coveted Star Wars character.

My friend would hand me the map and then, taking the shovel, I would proceed to excavate the backyard looking for treasure. Needless to say, the map was not exactly drawn to scale and by the end of the afternoon it looked like gophers had attack the backyard, with a thousand little holes and a rather substantial haul of toys to validate my efforts. Treasure!

In our Christian tradition we are cautioned to moderate our relationship to earthly "treasure" as Matthew 6: 19 & 20 cautions, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."

Yet, in today's reading we encounter a *positive* understanding of treasure, as a man discovers treasure with great joy in the field and then purchases the property. What kind of treasure is this? Well, it sounds more like the treasure we read about in 2 Corinthians 4: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." The treasure in this parable is the gospel. The treasure is Christ himself.

In this Holy Week, in this sacred season of preparation for Christ's death and resurrection, we pause to acknowledge that Jesus is the treasure that we seek. The Lord Jesus is the one to whom our life stories, and the whole universe bends towards.

Moreover, while Jesus remains our treasure, the journey towards this discovery of Christ as gift is *also* a joy filled act of discipleship. While finding that treasure in my friend's backyard using a map was fun, the adventure of setting out (shovel in hand) to discover the treasure was also meaningful. We are all on a journey of faith, apprenticed to Jesus our Saviour and Teacher. May this Holy Week be full of both treasuring Christ and appreciating the journey.

*Lord Jesus, we seek you and rejoice that in seeking, we discover that you have already found us. Let us treasure your gift of grace, love, and resurrection power. Amen.*

**Ross Lockhart** is Dean of St. Andrew's Hall and lives in North Vancouver.

Maundy Thursday, April 6

**John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

This chapter has been the most challenging one in the Bible for me. In fact, I am still struggling with the following questions:

- Is it possible to love others "to the end" as Jesus did his disciples?
- Is it possible to love anyone who dislikes or hates me?
- Is it possible to serve others as Jesus washed the feet of the disciples?
- Can I have unconditional love for others, not just my own children?
- Why am I more interested in being served than serving?
- Can I call even myself a disciple?

In the early 1990s, I attended a church retreat organized for more than one hundred Sunday school teachers. The last program of the two-day course was to visit twelve spots in the huge, wild, and dark campsite after dinner. All participants were divided into small groups, given a flashlight for everyone, and asked to keep silent until we finished the full program. Each spot had a small booth with a table and a light inside and required us to stay for a few minutes to read and meditate the bible chapter left on the table. Finally, our small group reached the last one, which was curtained with a black tarp around and had a sign "Meet the face of Judas Iscariot". It allowed one person each time to enter the booth. The most shocking moment was waiting for me when I opened the curtain. Honestly, I never shared this experience with anyone until now, although each Lenten season reminds me of the moment. I couldn't help but cry quietly "Sorry, Jesus". There was a mirror right in front of me.

Since that moment years ago, this prayer never leaves me:

*Dear God, please help me get answers to my questions, and grant me wisdom to understand the depth of Jesus' love as "he loved them to the end".*

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

Good Friday, April 7

**John 18:1-19:42**

*“They clothed him in a purple robe. They went up to him again and again, saying “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they slapped him in the face.” John 19.2b-3*

On Good Friday, many churches hold an ecumenical procession of witness, carrying a cross through the streets of their community. These can be solemn, reverent affairs as they move from one church to another for prayers.

When I was moderator of my presbytery, I took my turn carrying our two-metre high wooden cross. The natural route went through an outdoor drinking area, full of bars.

As we passed through, one man leapt up and screamed at me at the top of his drunken voice “Get that \*\*\*\*ing cross out of here!” That cry was perhaps the most authentic, memorable moment of that day.

It was a real verbal ‘slap in the face’. It was an echo of what that first Good Friday was like.

Bearing shame and scoffing rude;  
In my place condemned he stood;

There is something in the cross of Christ which hurts human pride: it makes a fool of human wisdom; it opposes all notion of human ability; it bankrupts all human merit; it is a great leveller, for it is the one means by which all people of every station in life enter God’s presence.

There is now, as there was in the days of the apostles, an offence of the cross.

Prayer:

*God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14)*

**Nigel Parker** is the minister of St Andrew’s, Sherbrooke in the presbytery of Québec. He served as a minister in Aberdeen, Scotland for more than 25 years before transferring to the PCC. A graduate of Aberdeen University and Princeton Theological Seminary, he is completing a Diploma of Presbyterian Studies through VST.



Holy Saturday, April 8

**Matthew 27:57-66**

*“Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”*

After Jesus' crucifixion, the religious leaders were afraid that they hadn't quite ended this problematic movement. They remembered that Jesus said he would rise from the dead after three days and worried that his disciples would perpetuate the first deception (that Jesus was the Messiah) by stealing his body and telling the people that Jesus had come back to life.

What could be worse than Jesus deceiving others while alive? Deceiving them in his death!

So the Pharisees go to the governor Pilate and ask him to post guards at Jesus' tomb for the next three days.

We, too, often scaffold our own lies so that we can get through the day.

Sometimes we find ourselves 'posting guards at the tomb' because personal gain is at stake. We may choose to believe in these deceptions because the truth inconveniences us or to avoid consequences.

But the reality is that we are protecting something that is dead.

God responds to this deception in Jesus Christ. Jesus ultimately deceived death itself in his resurrection, inviting us all into new life.

In Christ, we are able to lay down the deceptions in return for joy and hope that he will come again and make all things new.

*Gracious God, open our eyes to any lies we are holding that lead to death and give us the grace to turn towards you, the Giver of Life, so that we may live each day as your resurrected people. Amen.*

**Angie Song** is a resident of St. Andrew's Hall and a ThM student at VST in Missional Theology. After living and serving for many years in Ontario, she has recently moved to Vancouver for the beautiful view.

Easter Sunday, April 9

**John 20:1-18**

*“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’  
And she told them that he had said these things to her.”*

Happy Easter! How wonderful to reach this blessed and holy day together after a long and rich journey throughout the Lenten season! As we celebrate the joy, wonder and transformative power of the resurrection today, hear once again the gospel witness of that morning in the garden tomb. This remarkable story is one that proclaims God’s grace, love, and mercy for humankind and all creation. Today, and every day we celebrate the rising of the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

The imagery in John’s gospel on Easter Sunday is powerful. Mary Magdalene discovers that the tomb is empty and alerts the other followers of Jesus. Upon closer inspection, it is confirmed that *oddly* the tomb is empty. They leave the garden confused and uncertain as to the meaning of this discovery. But Mary remains behind lost in her thoughts and confused about what is happening.

She is grief stricken at the loss of Rabbi Jesus and, as she begins to cry, angels appear and ask her why she is weeping. Mary replies, “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” Having made this grief-filled confession she turns and bumps into someone who she presumes is the gardener. The gardener, like the angels, asks why Mary is crying. Her response is to beg that if he knows where the body has been moved to please let her know. And then, in an instant, the stranger calls Mary by name.

All at once the scene is transformed. She recognizes Jesus, once dead and now alive. “Rabboni!” And with that she’s off to tell others about her encounter with the risen Lord Jesus. In Mary we see the first true witness to the resurrection – hallelujah!

In my first call, I was privileged to serve a wonderful Reformed congregation in a remote Northern Ontario resource town. Just about every funeral I officiated at in town would come with the same request, “Reverend, could we sing that song about the garden?” Over time I knew what they meant. They wanted the classic hymn, “In the Garden.” The song of praise recalls this moment with Mary and Jesus on Easter Sunday. *He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own, and the joy we share as we tarry there none other has ever known.*

It always seemed a suitable witness to the resurrection. To stand with a grieving family, full of Easter hope, marking death and yet still celebrating life in all its abundance – from baptism to the end of our earthly days. Hallelujah indeed!

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, we celebrate your resurrection power today. Help us to hear you calling us by name. Help us to respond with joy and thanksgiving, now and always. Thank you for this life, life abundant, life eternal with you. Amen.*

**Ross Lockhart** is Dean of St. Andrew’s Hall.

# Notes



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