

St. Andrew's Hall
2021 Lenten Devotion Guide



The front cover was painted for this SAH Lenten devotional guide by St. Andrew's Hall resident, Marianna Rossetto, who is an artist from San Paulo, Brazil.



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*“to what is it owing that we have so great anxiety about our life,
that nothing suffices us...but because we foolishly imagine
that we shall nestle in this world forever?”*

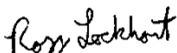
- John Calvin

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with the startling proclamation that “we are dust and to dust we shall return.” (Genesis 3:19). To a death-denying world, this definitive word of our beginning and end is a wakeup call for those who have bought into the self-help narrative of our modern culture promising five easy steps to a new and younger you. Lent is a journey for Christians that prepares us for the paradigm breaking truth, that in Jesus Christ we discover that a crucified Jew rules the cosmos. As an Easter people, we know that our end and new beginning takes place in the waters of baptism. Through the birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, we are set free from sin and death to live for God, and with God, in this blessed, yet broken world Christ died to save. We live cheerfully as witnesses to what the Triune God is doing in, through and amongst us in the neighbourhoods we inhabit.

This past year has stretched our faith, and our faith communities, to be that witness of hope and grace in the midst of a global pandemic, where we have experienced the heartbreak of lives lost, jobs made redundant and freedom curtailed in the name of love of neighbour. Perhaps you come worn out and exhausted to this season of Lent. Maybe you are a bit discouraged or even bewildered by the events of the last twelve months. However you come to this study, I pray that the words and witness of the St. Andrew’s Hall community will both bless and encourage you.

St. Andrew’s Hall has been a gospel witness on the University of British Columbia campus for The Presbyterian Church in Canada since 1955. The Lord has given us a vision that St. Andrew’s Hall is 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.

You are invited to join our community in the next forty plus days in this journey of prayer and discovery. In the pages ahead, you will be blessed and challenged by the reflections of our SAH community as we take steps together towards the empty cross and empty tomb that gives us new life. The world may be an anxious place just now, but we know that we’ve been made for life with God. As creatures made from dust, and made new through water and the Spirit, we claim the hope of the gospel, while letting go of our fears. By doing so, I pray that all may find comfort and joy that God gives us. In the cross, resurrection. In death, new life. In Jesus, our future. Thanks be to God.



Rev. Dr. Ross A. Lockhart
Dean of St. Andrew’s Hall

Ash Wednesday, February 17

Joel 2:1-17

“Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”

From early on the Christian movement understood itself as a pilgrimage. Within its story from year to year it encountered both the wonders of God's goodness and the harsh realities of its recurring rebellion. Lent evolved as a season of preparation for Easter. The outcome would be the joyous celebration of new life, but the pathway there was marked by the grim confrontation with our sinfulness and need for cleansing.

There is a profound tension in the life of pilgrimage. Joel describes the pilgrimage of God's people by posing the tension between Eden lost, and Easter coming: “Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, but after them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them” (Joel 2:3). Ashes remind us of all the ways that our pathway is marked by wilderness and rebellion. And at the same time, the ashes point us to the constant hope of growth towards goodness in the people's life.

The prophet admonishes us: “Yet even now,’ says the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:12-11). The ashes will be cleansed away, the pilgrimage will continue, and we will “blow the trumpet in Zion and sanctify a fast,” which in some fifty days we will celebrate with our risen and forgiving Lord.

Gracious God, as we embark upon this year's Lenten pilgrimage, may we confront our need for cleansing and renewing, and claim the good news of forgiveness and new life. Amen.

Darrell Guder is the professor of missional and ecumenical theology emeritus of Princeton Theological Seminary. He serves as Senior Fellow in Residence at St. Andrew's Hall, exploring how missional leadership can be equipped for the pilgrimage of witness in Cascadia and beyond.

Thursday, February 18

Psalm 25:1-10

*“Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.”*

Waiting is one of the most detestable things to do. From waiting in line at the bank, or waiting for a promotion at work, to waiting for the pandemic to be over; we rarely have the patience to wait.

Science and technology may have shaped us into the impatient people that we are today. In the olden days, people had to labor to plant and prepare their own food. Nowadays, we need very little effort to put food on our table. With the microwave, food can be served within minutes, or even seconds. By the same token, we like to see instant results and get agitated when no obvious results are in view. We dislike waiting, because we like being in control and knowing what’s ahead of us.

Against this tendency, the psalmist teaches us the virtue and the joy of waiting for God. For the psalmist, waiting is not a passive activity, but an active attitude, born of a relationship and trust in the God who knows everything and holds everything together. Betsy Childs Howard writes, *“Waiting exposes our idols and throws a wrench into our coping mechanisms. It brings us to the end of what we can control and forces us to cry out to God. God doesn’t waste our waiting. God uses it to conform us to the image of Christ.”*

This Lent, we join the psalmist in taking conscious and deliberate effort in waiting for God and God’s salvation. As we wait, we prepare ourselves to see God in ways we’ve never seen before.

*Lord Jesus, give us the grace today, to trust you and to wait for your salvation.
Amen.*

Karen Tin is a resident of SAH and a student of VST. She is originally from Indonesia, and currently working on her MA in Theological Studies.

Friday, February 19

Daniel 9:15-25a

“Lord our God [...] who made for yourself a name that endures to this day”

An umbrella and TV remote control are two things that have a short life span in our home. With young children playing and running around the house, what seemed to be a strong hard plastic has shown itself to be frail and flimsy.

Lately, I have noticed something else that seems to have little permanence – the news of our everyday lives. In a 24-hour news cycle world, it is easy to see how our ordinary, everyday lives have little lasting influence, even the stories that populate the human heart and bring meaning to life. I find it difficult to find news that lasts even for today, while even more difficult to find enduring stories that are good, perfect and acceptable.

In today's biblical passage the prophet Daniel prays to God, and in confessing his sins, Daniel exalts God by highlighting the way his name is made known throughout the ages. During the prayer, the angel appeared and revealed the coming of the *Anointed One*.

It is so beautiful how God hears, forgives, and continuously comes toward us.

In times when news seems ephemeral with not many reasons for optimism, I am grateful for God because he made himself a name that endures forever. The poet Rubem Alves states: "Optimism is when, being spring on the outside, spring is born on the inside. Hope is when, being absolutely dry on the outside, the sources continue to bubble inside the heart."

Dear God, we praise you, for your name is known also today, filling us with hope. Amen.

Paulo Pereira Jr. is married to Mariana, father of Catarina, Estêvão and the baby arriving soon. A Presbyterian minister from Brazil, Paulo is doing his Th.M. in Mission Theology at the Vancouver School of Theology. Paulo is glad to be part of the beautiful SAH community.

Saturday, February 20

Matthew 9:2-13

“It is not those who are healthy who need a physician but those who are sick... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

As I sit here contemplating this scripture passage with my “to-do” list piling up, I’m thankfully reminded of God’s sovereignty through God’s Son, Jesus Christ. At this moment, I’m paralyzed with fear. Will I meet those deadlines looming ahead of me? Will I succeed in all I have to do?

I need to bring these questions to Jesus, the healer and miracle worker. Jesus tells us he was given the authority and power to heal and forgive sins. He came for those who need him. I’m one of those people. I don’t need to fret because I’m forgiven for not being perfect and healed, in that order, as his peace washes over me.

Jesus calls us to follow him, not because we deserve it or are better than anyone else, but because he’ll transform us into someone he can work with. We can leave all our worries behind because Jesus will take care of them to free us up to be able to serve others. He won’t let us fail when we’re doing his work. We must have faith that Jesus is with us and for us. When we are tempted to give up and stay on our mats, Jesus tells us to get up and keep going. He gives us renewed energy to keep moving forward.

Our self-righteousness serves as a brick wall. Jesus gives us peace and the confidence that everything is under control. Is there anyone that we can think of that needs these comforting words today? Who can we share the good news of forgiveness and healing with?

Sovereign Lord, thank you that you came to save us by your power and authority. You have removed our sins and healed us so we can give you the glory and then focus our attention on helping others. Amen.

Patricia St. James Smith is a first-year student at VST working on her M.Div. She lives in the Garden of Eden in 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.

First Sunday of Lent, February 21

Mark 1:9-15

*“And a voice came from heaven:
“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*

Mark is a Gospel in a rush. One of Mark’s favourite words is “immediately.” There are no preliminaries as the Gospel gets going, just “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” and we’re off.

John the Baptist comes on scene and after a few quick words, Jesus arrives from Galilee, and with no words wasted, he is baptized by John. And, “immediately” the heavens are split. (If you are reading the NRSV, the Greek word for immediately, is hidden behind the word “just”.) / The Spirit descends like a dove. A voice says not to us but to Jesus. “You are my Son, my beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

God confirms what the Gospel is all about. It’s about Jesus and Jesus is God’s Son. And immediately, Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan (no time wasted on dialogue) and fed by angels, and next thing John is arrested, and Jesus is preaching the good news.

It’s like a movie on fast forward. Soon enough, we’re on a mountain and that voice speaks again, “This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him.” Just a little later, we are on another hill, outside Jerusalem, beside a cross. The last voice in the world you would expect, the centurion, the executioner speaks the truth we need to hear: “Truly, this man was God’s Son.”

Soon, Lent will be over, and we too will be at that hill. But slow down and be ready to hear about the Son.

*Loving God, you sent your beloved Son to join us in life, death, and life again.
Make us ready, we pray, to hear him once more. Amen.*

Stephen Farris is Dean Emeritus of St. Andrew’s Hall and served as Moderator of the 140th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Monday, February 22

Ephesians 2:1-10

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”.

There is a certain predictability to Lent. A pattern, an order, a liturgy. We start with John the Baptist and then Jesus in the wilderness. We hear words about renunciation, repentance, cleansing with God’s harsh scrub brush to get clean. And maybe you’re more disciplined than I am, but my rhythm includes making some promise for the Lenten season before dropping it a week or two in. What did the Enlightenment philosopher say? “God will forgive me—that’s his job”?

If these patterns are familiar, it’s important to remember that our Protestant forebears didn’t much celebrate Lent. This is a relatively recent reintroduction into the Protestant world, relearned from our Catholic separated kin (Anglicans and Lutherans—I fully expect your angry email denials, but bear with me). One difficult problem for us Protestants is where to stop throwing out traditions. And as we’ve readded liturgical seasons like Lent and Advent, we’ve found them helpful to a biblical, Reformed sort of faith.

What could be more biblical than repentance?

This is more important since our culture, quickly, picked up really poor understandings of Lent. It’s a time for a diet. Or for giving up cussing. Or sex (really! There’ve been whole movies about that!). In other words, if it’s fun, don’t do it in Lent. What a dismal understanding of the joy of repentance.

In reality the season of Lent, and all of Christian repentance, is about throwing off things that make us less human. The goal is to leave off injustice and rejoin the side of grace and goodness. It is, then, about becoming more joyful. This is hard to remember, with all the talk of repentance, barely audible over John the Baptist screeching in the wilderness, but it is so. Lent is about what the Catholic theologian James Alison calls “the joy of being wrong.”

Our human posture is more often to be defensive, to insist on our rightness to an irrational degree. But when we admit our sin, we fall hard into the arms of grace. Lent is about joy then, grace, becoming more human, admitting we’re wrong and asking God to make us and our neighbours and our enemies more right. Make it so among us quickly, great God of grace. Amen.

Dear Lord, we thank you for the promises of the gospel that lead us into life. Amen.

Jason Byassee is the Butler Chair in Homiletics & Biblical Interpretation at VST and Senior Fellow in the Centre for Missional Leadership.

Tuesday, February 23

Psalm 77

*“Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?
Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?”*

The psalmist begins today’s song by looking back upon troubling times in years past when the Israelites cried out to God, longing that God would hear a desperate plea for aid. Had God abandoned the psalmist? Was this person alone in the world?

Maybe you can think of times in your life when you’ve felt alone, even abandoned and uncertain whether there was a future where God would bless you? Several years ago, I was abandoned by a former resident at St. Andrew’s Hall. After move-out in the Spring, Mihye Park came across me in the hallway and, rather than discarding me, took me to the housing office. Later that day, several of the staff came by to say hello and Ross gave me the name “Andy the Bear,” with the official title of SAH mascot. From that day on, I had a new purpose and identity.

The psalmist recalls in the darkest moments that God is a divine source of rescue. The psalmist remembers God’s faithful presence with Israel as they fled Egypt. “The waters saw you and writhed...the clouds poured down water...your thunder was heard in the whirlwind...your path led through the sea...though your footprints were not seen.” In a time of despair and discouragement, God showed up and gave the people of Israel hope and provided a way.

Are you feeling alone or abandoned during this season of Lent, in a time of pandemic restrictions? Remember, our God is a rescuer, one who makes a path forward where we cannot see the way. Through empty cradle, cross and tomb we are adopted into a new family of faith, we are graphed onto Israel, the Red Sea parted now becomes *our story too*. As 1 Peter 2: 10 says so beautifully, “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Thanks be to God.

Loving God, thank you that even when we feel discarded or forgotten in life, you remind us through your living Word, Jesus Christ, that we are treasured, valued and precious to you. Amen.

Andy the Bear is the Chief Public Relations Officer for St. Andrew’s Hall and SAH’s official mascot. He can be found in the SAH staff room, reclining on the coach, and greeting everyone as they go about their day.

Wednesday, February 24

Matthew 4:1-11

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

After Jesus' baptism, the Spirit of God led him into a wilderness where he was tempted. After forty days and forty nights of fasting, deep reflection, and prayer about his call, the Tempter showed up.

The Devil was sly and persistent. The temptations came over and over and over. They struck at the very heart of Jesus' relationship with God. He was tempted to not rely on God's provision. He was tempted to not rely on God's power. He was tempted to not trust God.

We face the same temptations to not trust God's provision for what we need. We are tempted to be less than God created us to be, to compromise our trust in God's provision and care for us. Lent is a time of intentional reflection and prayer about our relationship with God and our trust in God's provision for our lives, the life of the Church, and the life of the world God loves.

An elder in a rural congregation dropped by the church building in January 2021. She wanted to check on things since it had been closed since March 15, 2020. She went into the sanctuary and noticed the list of hymns that were still posted from their last worship service together. The final hymn the congregation sang before being in the wilderness of the pandemic was God will take care of you.

Loving God give us the faith to trust that you are leading us and loving us through every wilderness. Amen.

Jean Morris is the General Presbyterian for the Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod. She serves on the Board of Saint Andrew's Hall and the Board of VST.

Thursday, February 25

Romans 3:21-31

“There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

~~Law~~ Love Makes Us Good. Would you want to live in a place without law, where people could do whatever they desire without any consequences? One could easily imagine how chaotic a lawless place would be.

Even in our world that is ruled by law, we have seen the evilness that humanity—including ourselves—are capable of doing. We need law *not* just to protect ourselves from the ‘bad guys,’ but also to safeguard ourselves from being one.

In the Bible, we learn that God too has given God’s good law to protect humanity from wounding each other. The problem is, while the law may prevent us from *doing* evil, yet we—as sinners—could not help but to perpetually *desire* sinfulness. This is why we would always be able to find ways to breach God’s law; and wounding each other in the process.

Thankfully, in Jesus Christ, God has given us the real antidote for our sinful desire. God became human—just like us—and self-willingly died on the cross for the sake of us. The cross demonstrates the profound depth of God’s love and desire for us; and in turn, it invites and ‘woos’ our desires back to God.

The truth is, the remedy for our sinful desires is *not* in desiring less evil—as if sinners like us are capable to do that—but rather, to desire more of God until we desire God more than anything else. The law is good, but only Love could make us truly good.

Jesus Christ, help us to see the depth of Your love so that we could desire You, more than anything else. Amen.

Samuel Andri is a student at VST, a resident of St. Andrew’s Hall and the technology assistant for the CML Missional Certificate Program

Friday, February 26

Romans 4:1-12

“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven; whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

Zoroastrianism has a common thread where the ideal goal was good thoughts leading to good words leading finally to good deeds, which leads to a good life.

Aristotle says a good character is a virtue where you can choose one path of action to lead to a good life.

There are countless examples of how humanity has to be saved by their good works and choices. It gives us a logical reason and standards we can measure others against for success. Even when looking back at Paul's discussion of Abraham, we discuss justification by works.

Yet, that is not what saved Abraham. Salvation arose out of a covenant of love. God chose to save Abraham. Abraham failed to trust God always; he was an idolator. We fail to trust God always because the world clouds our vision around us. We worship ourselves.

Yet, God has already saved us.

We know that an end is coming to each season of life, and we do not need to be afraid. Yet, we can become complacent when it comes to our response to God's salvation. Today is our summons to follow in the steps of Abraham, who journeyed, faltered, and failed. Surely we too want to try and make the world better for our descendants. Not to earn Salvation, but to share the same love and forgiveness with others that God shared with us. As Tauren Wells sings, "love is an action. Never for gain or to avoid pain, simply because it is the right thing to do."

Creator and Redeemer, thank you so much that you have seen our faulty achievements and covered them with love to permit us to grow. For you do not condemn unjustly, but by your grace ask us to act justly in love. Amen.

Jacqueline Cleland is a Presbyterian Master of Divinity at VST/SAH. She is currently working on her Sauder Business Certificate in leadership Excellence, the Centre for Missional Leadership Certificate in Missional Leadership, and her indoor jungle.

Saturday, February 27

Psalm 22:23-31

“For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”

I would often come home from a workday, filled with me listening to my colleagues and having to make decisions. My wife Fiona and I would reconnect as the sun set and she would share with me news of our children, her work and news from her family in Scotland. She would often have to stop me and in an exasperated tone say, *“I don’t want you to offer solutions, I need you to just listen.”*

Perhaps the greatest skill we can possibly possess is to actually listen to our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ and the people we work with each day.

Our God listens to us. Jesus hears us when we cry out to him because of our afflictions, grief, or pain from illness. But he also listens to us when we are celebrating, when we are filled with joy. We are told in scripture that he listens with joy when we worship and praise him.

Validation. It is a buzz word in the therapy world. Therapists tell us that a huge part of their job, when they are listening to their patients, is to validate their feelings.

The Holy Spirit listens and understands us when we can barely form the words to say what we are going through, when our minds and emotions are reeling from what we are experiencing. We are validated.

*Our Lord and God listen to us this day, hear us even when we can barely utter the words, may we feel your presence beside us and know you understand.
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.

Second Sunday of Lent, February 28

Mark 9:2-9

"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

It was a terrifying moment for Peter, James, and John. On the mountain top they saw Jesus' appearance transfigured before them and Elijah and Moses appearing alongside him. After that dazzling sight, they heard God's voice from a cloud affirming who Jesus really is. In that moment, the veil was pulled back, revealing Jesus' identity, radiant glory, and beauty. This scene is so otherworldly, so dramatic and fantastic.

From the cloud a voice proclaims, *"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"* Whatever the mystery of the transfiguration is about, it involves listening to Jesus. Are God's words a command? An invitation? A calling? All of the above?

God's word to them, and now to us, is to listen to this One who is not only the greatest prophet and the fulfillment of the law, but God's beloved Son. As we listen to Jesus and follow his way, the Holy Spirit will transfigure us so that we may say, along with the Apostle Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ [God's beloved Son] who lives in me."

*Loving God, we fix our eyes upon Jesus
and hear your Spirit's call to listen to him.
May your glory be seen in us as we follow him into the world
to be your agents of healing and hope. Amen.*

*Breathe in: This is my beloved Son.
Breathe out: Listen to him.*

Sumarme Goble is the Chaplain and Community Life Director at St. Andrew's Hall. She finds joy in helping people thrive in their relationships with God and others. Sumarme enjoys sharing good conversations and spending time outdoors with family and friends.

Monday, March 1

Genesis 21:1-7

“Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.”

Is God a God of order or disorder? Of course, God is a God of order—God’s redemption of creation is God’s re-ordering of a broken creation. This work brings healing and wholeness. But God’s work does not always follow our notions of orderliness or timeliness.

In this passage, God disorders our expectations so that there is no mistake: this is *God’s* doing. We can only marvel at God’s actions and give thanks.

Who would imagine the choice of an obscure, young Mesopotamian to begin the work of redeeming all creation? Who would imagine promising him a nation, land, blessing? Who would imagine Abraham and Sarah wandering around the Middle East as they wait for God’s promise to be fulfilled?

In Genesis 21, God *acts*. Out of order, at the wrong time. Only God could give Abraham and Sarah the child of promise at this point in their lives. Yahweh, the God of the covenant, acts in grace. This is sheer gift. The timing and character of God’s actions make clear that God’s work for our salvation and the redemption of all creation is God’s undeserved, inexplicable work of love.

In love, God disorders our lives so that our broken world may be healed and made whole.

“God of gracious love, who disorders our world to bring your kingdom, draw us into your surprising work so that we may participate with you, as Sarah and Abraham did, so that others may know you. Amen.”

Jonathan R. Wilson serves as a Senior Fellow of CML and Senior Consultant for Theological Integration, Canadian Baptist Ministries. He is the author of several books, including *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* and *God’s Good World: Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation*.

Tuesday, March 2

Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

*“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for
and assurance about what we do not see.”*

Hebrews 11 is the faith chapter. In it we read examples from the Hebrew scriptures of the heroes of faith: Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Moses, and many more. Each one of these looked ahead to something better. They clung to God's promises despite the very difficult circumstances of their lives. And life certainly isn't easy. Doubt easily creeps in, we can feel deficient and defeated, the news of the world is rarely good, our churches are empty (really empty over this past year!).

We would love some assurance that contrary to what we see in life, that everything will be okay. The reality is that faith is "the assurance about *what we do not see*." Faithfully persevering in the way of Christ regularly runs counter to the narrative of the world. When we ask what might cause us to stick with it, the answers might sound absurd from the world's standpoint: The Holy Spirit, the great cloud of witnesses, regular reading of Scripture, simple daily prayer, community with other believers.

The verse leading into Hebrews 11 is a rallying cry for persevering with bold faith: "But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved." (Hebrews 10:30)

We who follow Jesus are not among those who "shrink back." No—we are people who stand firm. We persevere. We have faith.

God of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Mary and Joseph, keep us on track. Do not let us shrink back, but increase our faith, and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Matt Brough is Minister of Prairie Presbyterian Church and Director of CyclicalPCC, a Church Planting initiative of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. A SAH/VST grad, Matt is an author and podcaster, living in Winnipeg with his wife, Cheryl, and their daughter, Juliet.

Wednesday, March 3

Jeremiah 30:12-22

“So you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

How to get unstuck when you are really stuck? Consolation should sound like, “You’re ok, I’m ok and it will be all right with the world.”

So, what’s consoling about Jeremiah’s often referred to as the “book of consolation”?

If our wound is so incurable and our injury beyond healing, what then is the answer?

In my humble opinion, it all sounds pretty bleak.

When your car gets stuck in deep snow, spinning your tires only exacerbates the problem and the tires go even deeper into the snow. You need help. Serious help to get you out of a serious situation. I remember growing up in Toronto pushing cars uphill all day long with my friends during snowstorms. Say what you will, but it was fun!

So, knowing what we know about the improbability to “self-help” our way out of an impossible situation, namely our sinful nature, spiritual rebellion and disobedience toward God, the prophetic promise “So you will be my people, and I will be your God” comes to us as an unbelievable breath of fresh air!

In what I’d like to refer to as the “Act of Consolation,” God’s promise is fulfilled in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus the Messiah suffered for our sin and rebellion. Jesus’ sacrifice is an offer of some serious help. Who is God reminding you to “console” today? Bring them to God in prayer.

Loving God grant us faith to live missional lives in our communities, as effective witnesses to the life-giving work of Jesus. Amen.

John Paeng is a SAH/VST grad, minister of St. Columba Presbyterian Church in beautiful Qualicum Beach, British Columbia and a member of the SAH Board.

Thursday, March 4

Exodus 19:16-25

“Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain”.

Sometimes I am afraid that I – that the church, that we – have domesticated God. Got a parking spot? Praise the Lord! Prayer takes on band aid-like qualities: slap a little prayer on and all is mended. Easy God-talk makes me restless. Shouldn't there be something more than a semi-domesticated pet of a God, like a roving cat who will return for dinner if you call for long enough?

Mount Sinai asks if I'm ready for a God who isn't domesticated.

When the Israelites meet God, day breaks with terrifying natural effects which herald God's coming, the swelling soundtrack that declares: Be ready! Pay attention! The people leave the camp: theophany is too overwhelming to fit in the everyday. They stand at the foot of the mountain and dare go no further.

God descends to the highest point and summons Moses up, telling him to warn the people against approaching. Repeated vertical language reiterates the distance, the difference, between God and us. God is so holy; God's presence is dangerous.

God is holy. We are not. We of all times and peoples know how much our house needs cleaning. We are dirtied not by the desert but by generations of unjust laws and personal and systemic prejudices that have shaped us. We are not ready. We want to gaze upon God, *and* we tremble at the thought.

God comes down anyway, wrapped in holiness that awes and terrifies, holiness that prepares to welcome us nearer, through the words that God speaks next.

Holy God, we need you. Shape us into a people whose lives mirror your holiness so that our everyday lives reflect your love for all the world.

Janet Eastwood lived at St. Andrew's Hall during her studies at the Vancouver School of Theology. She graduated in spring 2020 and is currently co-director of Camp Douglas, a Presbyterian summer camp on the Sunshine Coast.

Friday, March 5

Acts 7: 30-40

*“This is the Moses who told the Israelites,
‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’”*

Moses was the first and most important Prophet, who brought His people out of the land of Egypt. Moses promised that there would come after him another Prophet, who would be the fulfillment of God’s plan of redemption. He would save his people from their sin and restore them the joy of their salvation.

Moses warned that Israel should take special care to listen to him. But just like Israel rejected Moses, so did many of their descendants reject Jesus, who is the Prophet that Moses spoke about.

In this post-Christendom culture, how and why do we reject Jesus Christ today? How can we come to receive Him as our deliverer, as our rock and salvation?

So, what guides our lives today? Pseudo-intellectualism? Economics and materialism? Social media and cultural norms? Only by starting with God’s revelation can we understand what He designed us to be. Only when we look to God’s word can we recognize false idols, recognize our sin and our need for grace, and embrace His guidance for meaningful living.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for showing the end from the beginning through Moses, who faithfully spoke Your word...and for Jesus, the ultimate Prophet who instructs us with all we need to illuminate The Way for faithful lives.
Amen.*

Steve Norris is a SAH Board member and elder at Richmond Presbyterian Church. He has a Counselling Private Practice in Vancouver and stays active keeping up with his granddaughters.

Saturday, March 6

Psalm 19

*“The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands
... their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”*

This Psalm comes to mind almost daily as I'm out in the neighborhood. Turning north, the majestic mountains towering over the ocean suddenly appear. Though I am used to the view, its' magnificence never fails to impress me.

God's creation continues to faithfully obey His command. Trees bear fruit, flowers bloom and the sun give light. They provide blessings to us who are the crown of His creation. How deeply sorrowful it is then that we continuously fail to follow His instruction. Our failures are so great we cannot even recognize the full scope of them (v. 12.)

Yet, the very God whose commandments we break is the One who provides the grace we need! His love for us is deeper than the ocean, higher than the mountains and never withering like the flowers of the field. The sunshine He provides leaves us every night, but the Son-shine of Christ the Savior never fades. Through His suffering and crucifixion, victory over sin and death, He has redeemed us.

We can therefore boldly and joyfully join the rest of His glorious creation in singing praise and proclaiming His truth to the world.

God, help us to bear witness of Your truth in our various vocations, so we shine Your light in a dark world. Amen.

Silva Kraal is a Community Coordinator living at SAH. She remains a firm Lutheran despite occasionally donning a John Calvin shirt at community events!

Third Sunday of Lent, March 7

John 2:13-22

*“Jesus answered them,
‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’”*

On January 6th, 2021, a group of people caused a major disturbance when they stormed Capitol Hill, upset tables and furniture, and called out officials in the Capitol Building, one of the actual and symbolic seats of government, power and authority in the United States.

This passage from John 2 describes a time when Jesus also marched onto a hill in Jerusalem and caused a disturbance when he upset tables and called out officials in Jerusalem’s actual and symbolic seat of government, power, and authority.

Beyond the surface similarities of these two events, the meaning of these two incidents could not be more different. Comparing them can help us understand the purpose and importance of Jesus’ actions for our mission and lives today. While the group marching on Capitol Hill violently crashed through doors at the behest of a leader who was clinging to power, Jesus was prophetically and lovingly warning the temple establishment that God was moving houses and giving them the opportunity to join in God’s resurrection and restoration project.

While the mob on Capitol Hill risked the lives of others causing death and damage in their violent acts, Jesus took his prophetic actions in the temple at the risk of his own life for the good of his people – indeed for the good and recovery of the whole creation.

As we contemplate our own call to prophetically bear witness to the loving presence and restorative purposes of God in our day, let us remember that this is always a call to the pathways of truth and love. And do not be surprised if this way of truth and love will at times be costly.

Jesus, lead me to follow you in the way of truth and love this Lenten season, even when that path is costly to me. Amen.

Tim Dickau pastored Grandview Church for three decades and today is the CML Associate leading our Missional Certificate Program as well as Executive Director of City Gate Forum.

Monday, March 8

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

“By the grace God has given me . . .”

I like the way Paul — the greatest yet the humblest apostle of Jesus Christ — lays his reasoning in regard to the church division that happened in Corinth. While the church members cared so much more on who was the greatest between him and Apollos and Cephas (v.22), and how they took pride on their leader, Paul chose not to “fan the flame” on his followers to continue to “despise” Apollos’ teachings and Cephas’ teachings. Instead, Paul humbly chose to establish a beautiful theological reason, so that his church members (as well as Apollos’ and Cephas’) would be able to see the real issue in God’s big picture.

In response to the praises, he received mainly from his followers — as if it was because of his own merit or skillfulness — he clarified that it was not his, but “by the grace God has given me . . .” that he did what he did and that he taught what he taught. And not only that, God’s grace is the dynamo of his ministry, God’s grace is also the very foundation on which he builds his teachings and ministry towards the church in Corinth. With that in mind, Paul clearly ends his letter by saying, “no more boasting about human leaders!” (v.21)

As theological students we all have our own favorite theologians in some degree, whether that be Calvin, Luther, Knox, or Barth. Though there is nothing wrong with that in regard to our academic preference, yet today’s devotion reminds us of the danger that could lead to division among the body of Christ. And I believe if our favorite theologians are still alive today, they would also express the same sentiment as what Paul expressed: “By the grace God has given me . . . all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.” (v.1, 22, 23)

Dear Lord, thank you for our mentors in the faith that have helped us to take the next, most faithful step in following you. Thank you also that we do not mistake the inspiration of those mature Christians who encourage us, with our devotion that belongs to you alone. Amen.

Daniel A. Surya is a MATS program student at VST, and he and his family have been residents of SAH since August 2019.

Tuesday, March 9

2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19

“The Priests went into the sanctuary of the Lord to purify it. They brought out to the courtyard of the Lord’s temple everything unclean that they found in the temple of the Lord.”

My wife jokes that my favourite cleaning tool is the garbage bag! Sometimes, we have to remove the junk to really see what we are dealing with.

On the first day of the first month of his reign, King Hezekiah set out to having the temple of the Lord cleaned and purified.

The structure mirrored God’s people. They were a mess on the inside!

This wasn’t just a mere sweep, dust and polish job, either. It took the priests and Levites eight days to gut the temple, and another eight days to consecrate the temple for God’s glory. This was a “Spring Cleaning,” of epic proportions.

Similarly, as God’s people, we need more than just a touch up ourselves. Sin leaves us a mess on the inside. It takes some heavy lifting and a few days to clean out. Three days, (from Good Friday to Easter Sunday) to be precise!

The Lenten season invites us to look deep within, take account of where we find ourselves, and begin that work of cleaning out our lives. To make room, so that we might grow to become more Christ-like. Jesus meets confessing and repenting hearts with his grace, forgiveness and love.

The Good News that Jesus promises doesn’t leave us gutted and empty; rather Jesus cleans us out and fills us up with his own Spirit, which is Holy! The same spirit which raised Christ in resurrection fills us and sends us out to proclaim Christ, and him risen!

Lord Jesus, as we confess the things of our lives that are not of you, may we encounter your love for us as we seek to live grace-infused and Spirit-filled lives. Amen.

Rev. Andrew Campbell is a SAH/VST grad and the husband to Candace, father to Addison and Noah. He is Minister at St. James Presbyterian Church in Truro, NS.

Wednesday, March 10

Psalm 84

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty!”

This is a long psalm – there are many things to be taken from it, but I am focused on the last verse: “O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.”

The psalm speaks of the joy of worshipping in the temple – even the birds want to be near the altar.

It is a joy for me to worship in my church; I often like to visit when no one else is there, to sit quietly and feel the loving presence of God.

To speak to Him, not to ask for anything but rather to thank Him for my many blessings.

There have been times when God’s plan for my life has not always been clear to me. Over the years I have learned to trust in Him – because for me worrying means not trusting.

I have come through some struggles in my life and have always found God’s presence to be a comfort, and his house – my church - a place where I find tranquility, clarity and hope.

That truly is a blessing.

Dear Lord, thank you for being the “sun” in my life; your presence is light and life to every new day.

Valerie K. is a St. Andrew’s Hall staff member.

Thursday, March 11

Genesis 9: 8-17

"I will remember my covenant between me and you...."

God had decided to wipe out humanity due to their wickedness and to start over with Noah and his family. By faith and in obedience to God's instructions, Noah built an ark to survive the up-coming calamity... a horrific 40-day storm and the subsequent flood.

Being voluntarily confined in my home for the past 9 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic helped me to imagine how Noah might have felt after being confined in the ark for a year. As Noah emerged, he expected to find a dismal wasteland knowing that the world he once knew, his neighbourhood, his friends and relatives would all be gone.

Instead, he was greeted with a breathtaking rainbow made by the sun, shining through millions of tiny prisms, of rain droplets, refracting the sun's light into a spectrum of colours. Noah's spirit was lifted and was reassured of God's providence. He went forth with hope! What a wonderful feeling it must have been to emerge from the dark dungeon of the ark into this amazing visual display.

This image gives us assurance that our infinitely creative and proactive God, the one who has paid attention to creating the rainbow, cares for us. He can be trusted and will keep His promises. No matter what dark places we find ourselves in, we can depend on Him to call us to emerge into his wonderful light. He is a God who does not give up on us, who gives us second chances, again and again.

Lord make us your prisms so your light can shine through us to take away the breath of the world. Amen

Victor Ling is a SAH Board member, a cancer scientist who loves to find creativity in unexpected places.

Friday, March 12

Ephesians 1: 7-14

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us."

There are four more weeks until we celebrate the Resurrected Christ. We are in a seasonal midpoint with Lenten austerity heightened by the state of the world. Efforts to stay socially distant combined with the harsh reality of economic instability mean we are not in an abundant mind frame. Yet, here it is, written in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We are lavished with the riches of God's grace.

Ephesians 1:7-14 lays out God's aim for His only Son's death and resurrection to reconcile all things in heaven and earth to Himself. We sit in the middle of Lent contemplating God's purpose that led Christ to obediently give up his successful healing ministry then submit to public ridicule and shame. We marvel at his willingness to follow a plan that ultimately led to his death on the cross. We are instantly reminded of the harshness of death surrounding us and the seemingly successful ministry endeavors we have put on hold to keep the general population safe.

It is hard to reconcile the mystery of God's lavish grace with anything going on right now. Be comforted, we do not live in the middle. In four Sundays, the sun will rise. We will shout Hosanna! All things in heaven and on earth are made new in Christ over and over again!

Christ, we come to you with thankfulness. In the absence of your physical presence on earth, you give us another advocate. We pray for the Holy Spirit to meet us in the middle of Lent and deepen our understanding of the Father's lavish grace. Amen

Allyson McCombs is a third year MDiv student at Vancouver School of Theology, most interested in congregational care and faith formation with PC-USA. She is a midwestern transplant to the Pacific northwest. Aside from studying, Ally is a wife, mother, singer, knitter, and friend.

Saturday March 13

Numbers 20: 22-29

“But Aaron shall be gathered to his people”

Despite being very young, I vividly remember touching my grandfather's body at his funeral. His hands were cold, and his face was pale. Looking at the lifeless face of my grandfather, I became lost in my own thoughts. One thought that lingered in my head was the realization that “there is no beautiful death.”

Aaron is dead. Like all deaths in the world, his death was not beautiful. The death of Aaron, which was in front of the Promised Land, was even pitiful. However, I don't mean this with a negative connotation and rather think the contrary. There are many reasons why I think this way, but the most prominent is the fact that Aaron goes to a place to be gathered to his people. This world is filled with sorrow, despair, pain and sadness, but no such thing exists when Aaron reunites with his ancestors and God. What awaits him is everlasting hope and joy.

In Korea, a pastor not only forgave the killer of his two sons but adopted him as his own. As his sons were preparing to go to the U.S, they were killed by a man. However, the pastor decided to forgive the killer. The pastor understood that the killer was brainwashed by his organization. So, he forgave him. Following his forgiveness, he prayed to God saying, “God, thank you for letting my children go to a better land than America.”

Dear Lord, help us to pray and trust that we will see the beauty you have prepared after death, something more amazing than we could ever experience in this world. Amen.

Chanil Lee is an Alum at SAH/VST, serving Disciples Korean Methodist Church and Vancouver Taiwanese Church as a Youth Pastor.

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 14

John 3: 14-21

“Light has come into the world.”

There is a beautiful ravine in my backyard that runs along a woodland of enormously tall evergreen trees. When I gaze outside my window, I feel so peaceful and calm. The only problem with having a magnificent forest surrounding my house, is that it often blocks sunlight from shining in through the windows. However, occasionally when the sun finds its way through the branches, the bright rays of light pierce through the curtain of trees and fills up my living room. The light is so strong and direct that it reveals everything dirty - dust in the air and on the tables, silky spider webs stretched across the ceiling, strands of hair on the floor and flying cat fur.

Jesus came as the Light. The Light is so forceful and bright that no matter what you do to hide your sins, it will pierce into your life and your heart, and expose all your sins. Is there any dirt in your heart today?

In the wilderness, the unbelieving and rebellious Israelites suffered and died from the snakebites. All they required to be healed was to look at the bronze serpent on the stick Moses lifted up. Likewise, all we have to do to be saved from our sins is to simply believe in Jesus, who was lifted up on the old rugged cross. Why should we remain in the darkness of sins and refuse to believe in Jesus who became a curse, taking away our sin and eternal condemnation?

Surrender to Jesus today.

Lord Jesus, let Your Light reveal how sinful I am, and how vast Your Love for me and the world is. Amen.

Lydia Bae is an ordained minister in the PCC and the interim director of Cyclical Vancouver.

Monday, March 15

Hebrews 3: 1-6

“For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.”

Jesus Christ is our rock and anchor in this life. Because of the faithfulness of Christ, we can rest in the assurance of our salvation. Moses, as the faithful servant brought the people out of Egypt and thus proved God’s faithfulness in keeping the promises that He made to His people.

Moses brought us the Law as a guide, to show us how far away from the ideal that we have strayed, and how much we need to rely on the righteousness of God. The Law points to Jesus as the one in whom we must put our trust. Jesus as the high priest came to us not to condemn us with the Law, but in order to fulfill the Law. The author of Hebrews is saying that while Moses was a great and faithful servant, it is only Christ that will save us. He is the author and defender of our salvation in whom we need to put our faith and trust. Moses is the servant who leads us to Christ.

It is not the Law of Moses that will save us, but the faithfulness of Christ. His complete submission to the Father’s will, right up to the cross, is what Moses and the Law, and everything points towards. Keeping to the letter of the Law is an impossible task and only leads to condemnation. But by putting our trust in Christ, there is no more condemnation. Without Christ, we only have the Law which will not save.

Loving and gracious heavenly Father, thank you for your faithful servant Moses who points the way to Jesus as our Saviour. We are grateful that Jesus was faithful to your promises and through which we can come to know you and live our lives according to your will.

Richard Knowler is a Ruling Elder at Fairview Presbyterian Church, on staff at Union Gospel Mission and a student at SAH/VST.

Tuesday, March 16

1 Corinthians 10:6-13

“And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

There's a special kind of dis-ease we easily fall prey to in our North American affluence: terminal uniqueness. Societal and media messages encourage this; we are barraged with the message that there is nobody else who has ever had the same experiences, emotions and temptations that we have. Each of us is so special and unique that nobody else could possibly understand our experiences.

Paul pushes against that attitude and reminds us that when we experience any trial or test or temptation, others have navigated through these challenges before us. And their triumph over the obstacles of life stands as a testimony to us that it is possible, through God's gracious provision, to succeed rather than surrender, to press on rather than retreat. When we trust that God is always present with us no matter our circumstances, we can see that we are provided the means to overcome our challenges.

The ultimate example of this is our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Stripped of the support of friends, abused and tortured, Jesus endured circumstances which could easily have been more than any human could bear. But God provided Jesus with a way through the worst of experiences, death on a cross, to claim victory. We, too, are invited to be “more than conquerors.”

Grant me faith and trust that you, Lord Jesus, are with me and guide me even in the most difficult of circumstances. Amen.

Janet Taylor is the presiding Minister of Word and Sacraments at Braeside Presbyterian Church in St. Albert, Alberta, and is pursuing her Doctor of Ministry focusing on the intersection of membership in the PCC and the global audience afforded by the world wide web.

Wednesday, March 17

Psalm 107:1-16

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

Psalm 107 answers a question that a group of people are asking as they end their experience of exile:

“What does a proper return to worship look like—after not worshipping together for so long?”

It will come as no surprise during this time of novel corona virus that more than a few of us are asking the same question, day in and day out, as we sit alone in the dark, feeling chained to our own homes. Beloved, we the 'together but separate' long to see the light at the end of this tunnel—or at least the bottom of this dark dungeon.

But for these Israelites in Psalm 107, a proper return to worship after their time away, in *their* darkness, now has them gathering once more from every direction. Long their imprisoned spirits have laid—but then, finally, they get the call. The ban on traveling to their place of worship has been lifted. And if this traveling band of worshipers brings anything less than absolute pandemonium to everyone they see, they have missed their mark entirely. For the LORD's redeemed can't shut up.

Beloved, our light is coming. And when our present dungeon is filled with light, and our chains have been loosened, we as well won't stop proclaiming about the One who breaks our chains and who takes us from utter darkness into a place of redeemed light. We will race from our time of exile to a time in which we, as friends and family, can come together again and sing. We will sing to both the Lord and to each other the glories due to His loving, chain breaking, light bringing Name—so that we may go out together again—no longer wandering in the waste as individuals... but sent with a purpose together. The purpose of praising the LORD everywhere.

The light of our community has come, friends. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so.

“God of Enduring Love, let we the redeemed of the LORD declare that your light continues to bring us together and send us out.”

Stephen P. Bell is a Minister on Vancouver Island, graduating from St. Andrew's Hall in 2020. He has a wife named Amy and a small, overly brave puppy named Beatrix that he's pretty sure is not meant for this world.

Thursday, March 18

Isaiah 30: 15-18

*"In returning and rest, you will be saved.
In quietness and trust you will find strength."*

It seems the more we struggle against the latest turmoil in life the tighter the grip over our lives it can have. I recall wasting time deliberating over one issue or another, only to feel defeated and anxious when I have not been able come up with a solution. It is usually during times like this that our perspective is askew and there seem to be few resting places where one can pause and reflect.

God knows our ways and is graciously waiting for us. We need to quiet our rushing thoughts, still our hearts and trust in God who will give us strength. In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus calls us to, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light."

During these times of stress and uncertainty in our world as we live through a pandemic, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and burdened. We look outside for answers from the government and the scientific community to quell our thoughts and give us rest. Yet true peace comes from the inside and is as close as our breath.

Lord God as you graciously wait upon us, give us wisdom to trust in your ways and grant us patience to graciously wait upon you in the quietness and trust.

Shirley Carleton is a Master of Divinity student at St. Andrew's Hall/Vancouver School of Theology and member of St. Aiden's Presbyterian Church in New Westminster.

Friday, March 19

John 8:12-20

*"I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life."*

To Jesus' statement that he is, "the light of the world" and whoever follows him will "never walk in darkness but will have the light of life," the Pharisees' objection is wrapped in terms of legality: one cannot appear as one's own witness. Jesus declares he "stands with the Father, who sent me" and therefore has a second witness, thus making his testimony valid according to the law. Again, he is met with a doubting, practical question, "Where is your father?"

Like in a tense courtroom drama, Jesus' assertions are put through rigorous, even hostile, scrutiny via the logic of "human standards." Jesus, putting himself in great peril by his declarations, stands before the people, a man, in the flesh, revealing enigmatically that those who "know him, would know his Father, also."

Jesus told us that he is the light of the world and in this we believe. How do we answer those who question our faith in the manner of the Pharisees? In a world where so many mysteries appear to be laid bare by science, how do we help others transcend the boundaries of human standards in their own way of viewing Jesus?

Trying to live as He did in the world, with all our thoughts and actions proceeding from the love of God, brings Jesus into the world for others.

Lord, help us to live in the world through your love so we may help others to walk, not in darkness, but in the light of life. Amen.

Christopher Orr is Facilities Manager at St. Andrew's Hall. He volunteers as Treasurer, Parish of St. James', Vancouver. With their little dog, Pip, Christopher, and wife Barbara enjoy strolling their green Kitsilano neighbourhood and meeting friendly folk along the way.

Saturday, March 20

Habakkuk 3:2-13

*“You came out to deliver your people,
to save your anointed one.”*

When will it all end!

Violence, injustice, destruction, conflict.

Habakkuk cries out to God in the opening verses. He has grown weary of the wickedness that he witnesses all around him. He desires for people to live in peace and harmony with one another.

When will it all end!

Violence, injustice, destruction, conflict, PANDEMIC.

We too cry out to God. We have grown weary of the wickedness that we witness around us. And, perhaps more so, we have grown weary of pandemic living. We long to return to pre-pandemic life, a time of renewed relationship with one another.

The world often seems to be spinning out of our control. And it is! We hold no control. We can no more bring about God’s Kingdom than we can halt the movement of the sun across the sky. But God can!

In our reading today, Habakkuk shares a vision of God’s coming and once again conquering the chaos, as God first did at creation (Gen. 1). God stands in the middle of the chaos that humanity has both willingly and unwittingly brought about—the only light in the darkness—destroying that which is judged to be wicked and saving God’s people.

God is the One who will usher in God’s Kingdom... in God’s time. And knowing this, we can trust that God will bring us through all that we wish would simply end... in God’s time.

*Almighty God, help us to focus our prayers on “thy will” not “my will,”
no matter the challenges we face. Amen.*

The Rev. Shelly Chandler is a St. Andrew’s Hall / Vancouver School of Theology graduate. She currently serves in First and St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Churches in Pictou, Nova Scotia.

Fifth Sunday of Lent, March 21

John 12: 20-33

“Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.”

“We would like to see Jesus,” was their request. In response, Jesus describes a kernel of wheat falling to the ground in death. Not the most enthusiastic welcome for potential new followers.

But Jesus was living the reality of his immanent death right then. Perhaps the intensity of the coming hour was a teachable moment more significant than a handshake and a “where are you from?” sort of chat.

Turns out if you’d like to see Jesus it entails: a taste of death before the new breath of life.

Seeing Jesus is like a seed that gives up its life as a small hard-shelled kernel in order to gain its life as a full stalk of graceful wheat. From the seed’s breaking open in the darkness of soil, new life springs; abundant life able to sprout even more life. A stalk of wheat produces as many as fifty kernels, each able to grow a stalk of fifty more kernels.

When we ask to see Jesus, we are sometimes presented with something other than what we requested, something buried, something to be broken open that for a time seems like death, but for all time turns out to be life-giving. What is God’s Holy Spirit breaking open in you that you might see Jesus?

Lord Jesus, we long to see you at work in this beautiful, yet broken world. We long to see and participate with you in the healing, blessing, creating and redeeming work of grace that comes with your resurrection life. Help us to see what you see, grant us the vision and the way of a renewed creation. Amen.

Rebecca Simpson is the Director of Denominational Formation at St. Andrew’s Hall / Vancouver School of Theology and Minister at St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church in Mission, BC. She sometimes misses the sunny breezy days she lived in the Swan River Valley of Manitoba in view of the flowing waves of flowering flax.

Monday, March 22

2 Corinthians 3: 4-11

“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”

As a graduate of VST the concept of “competency” has shaped my education, and ultimately the way I approach preparing for worship. The papers that we were required to submit, were not assigned letter grades. Our work was ranked on a competency scale: Very Good; Good; Not Yet Approved.

“Not Yet Approved” meant that we needed to redo the assignment. Some Faculty were easier to please than others, and some turned papers back with such frequency that we called them, “never approved *name*”. Yet, if we were honest, we would also admit that these faculty members made us desire to do better than to simply turn in the first draft.

The Scriptures we meditate on today remind us that none of us are competent in what we do, or in who we are but that as people who live in Grace, our competence comes from God.

When our competence comes from God, then what we do, is more than “Very Good.” When we rely on the Holy Spirit then what we do is “More Glorious”.

What we do in the gifts and talents given from God, sanctified in Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit is more than competent. Our lack of perfection through the Spirit becomes “more glorious” (v. 8) and “an example of righteousness” (v.9). What we do in the Spirit has “a glory that lasts” (v.11)

As we journey to Easter, we are reminded that though we may feel as if we are “Not Yet Approved” we are a people who are shaped by Grace. We are a people redeemed in Love. We are a people made “competent” in God. Not only competent; but, “more Glorious”, and made righteous with a glory that lasts. Glory be to the Lord Jesus Christ who is our competence and our Glory.

Bring us to the place, O Lord, where we see the glory of your hand in all that we do. Amen.

Ena van Zoeren is the minister at St. Andrew’s, Salmon Arm, the mother of a beautiful daughter, the Grammie of three wonderful boys, a graduate of VST and a member of the Board of St. Andrew’s Hall.

Tuesday, March 23

Isaiah 44: 1-8

*“This is what the LORD says—
Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:
I am the first and I am the last;
apart from me there is no God.*

Israel was in exile. Far away from their land and with no temple to worship their God in, they often wondered if Yahweh was still their God.

Isaiah spoke to God's people amid their despair to answer their questions and affirm their identity as God's people. Second Isaiah (chapters 40-66) brings a message of hope and comfort. The prophet invites Israel to remember that they are still his chosen people.

Isaiah also envisions a grander second exodus, where Israel will witness God's liberation, experience the pouring of his Spirit and the restoration not only of their land but the whole creation. Isaiah 44:6 captures the very heart of the chapter and the faith that Second Isaiah wants to imprint on Israel.

Yahweh is still the only God who controls the destiny of Israel and the whole world.

After the disastrous year of 2020, many of us are wondering what this new year will bring. Many of us deeply long for this time of pandemic to be over. Today, Isaiah invites us to trust God because this is still his world, and we are his people; he has not abandoned us, and he never will.

Almighty and loving God in this time of lent, let us remember your promises; you are our God, and we are your people. Guide us to show the world in our words and actions who you are. Amen.

Daniel Martinez works on staff at St. Andrew's/St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church in North Vancouver, is Co-Director of Camp Douglas and is a Master of Divinity student at SAH/VST. He is also a huge fan of Star Wars!

Wednesday March 24

Haggai 2:1-9,20-23

“Take courage, work, for I am with you. I will give prosperity, says the Lord.”

We hold many things in tension on our daily journey through life and, as Christians, we feel this especially as we travel our Lenten journey every year. It is often trying and challenging, but 2021 seems to be the “*Lent-i-es*” of Lents. It is as if those spikes on the corona virus have been stabbing at our vulnerabilities of Spirit for a whole year.

In this Lenten time, 2021, the tension is great, the distance is far.

I am fortunate to spend some of my ministry time as a hospital chaplain. Normally, I enjoy my time in the Halifax Health Care System, but this week saw the arrival of yet another piece of Personal Protective Equipment. It felt like I was doing my job while “Deep Sea Diving.” There was such as distance between them and me. I was behind the mask, under the Face Shield, and wrapped in a disposable gown. I left visits feeling far apart from the people with whom I was trying so hard to connect.

I suspect that this is a struggle common to all of us. We are all growing tired of trying to connect deeply with other people. It seems it was the same in the prophet Haggai’s time as well. Thankfully, for us today, Haggai’s message is just as applicable to our time, and his voice rings as clearly as ever: Take courage! Covid-19 is reshaping us and the church. I suspect people are questioning, just as they did in Haggai’s day: What will be left of us when our troubles have passed?

Who is left among you who have seen this house in its former Glory?

Our physical work world may have changed during this pandemic, but we are still being called to work on building a new temple: The Body of Christ. We are tasked to take care of others, our faith communities, our neighbours, and the Child of God that dwells behind our own mask.

Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord! The latter shall be greater than the former, and I will give you prosperity, declares our God!

Dear Lord, help us to trust in your abiding presence, and to know that our courage and strength comes from you. Amen.

Calvin Burt is a student minister serving at Kings-New Minas Presbyterian Church and is the Presbyterian Chaplain within the Halifax Health Care System. In his spare time, he is a student at St. Andrew’s Hall and VST.

Thursday, March 25

Psalm 119:9-16

*"I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*

The first bible verse that I memorised as a child was Matthew 6:9-13 (the Lord's Prayer), I did not understand what the words meant but in my young mind these were "Holy" words. These verses were the anchor for my soul through anxious and fearful times, periods of doubt in my teenage years and continue to sustain me through trials and tribulations in adulthood.

I used to think that I was not clever nor pious enough to study God's word and felt it did not apply to my life. As I learned to pray, meditate, and ponder upon His words, I felt a desire to live differently. Timothy Keller wrote *"If you don't trust the Bible enough to let it challenge and correct your thinking, how could you ever have a personal relationship with God?"*.

Today, the Bible is available at the touch of a fingertip, but so are numerous false promises of quick fixes and instant gratification. Technology and consumerism have given rise to various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Tik Tok, Twitter and so on. Indeed, it all seems innocuous enough and yet the lines between deception and authenticity are blurrier than ever.

The faces of temptation may change, but God's Word is always constant and abiding. His promises that we will not be tempted beyond what we can bear and will provide a way out for us remain true. Even when Jesus was tempted in the desert, he turned to the scriptures *"that man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord"* (Deuteronomy 8:3).

What is your attitude towards reading the Bible today? In this season of Lent, what practical steps are you taking to pattern your life after God's Word?

Our Heavenly Father nourish me with your Holy Word so that I am reminded of your Spirit living in me. Give me the strength and wisdom to live my life according to your will. Amen

Mavis Ho is Executive Assistant to the Dean of St. Andrew's Hall. She is a member of the Fraserlands Alliance Church in Vancouver and has admittedly developed a soft spot for Presbyterians.

Friday, March 26

Jeremiah 33: 1-9

“The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard.”

Without the word of God, you are indeed confined.

I watched an interview with a person who had been in prison. The man said that prison was a dreadful place. The interviewer asked him what he feared most there. His answer was simple: “There was no freedom.”

Here is a story of a prophet in prison. He is, like any other prisoner, deprived of physical freedom. However, he has real freedom: true freedom that cannot be confined by steel prison gates nor the shackles and chains. That freedom is the freedom of the soul to hear the word of God. Although his body is bound, his soul can freely communicate with God.

This freedom of soul does not go away easily. No, it never goes away. This is a freedom that no one can ever take.

Today, many people are experiencing tremendous stress during the pandemic and struggle with the freedoms that have been stripped away due to lockdowns. However, the "freedom of soul" is not taken away. Like Jeremiah, we can still hear, meditate, understand, and feel the word of God, and can be strengthened by it.

What is true freedom? I think true freedom is freedom of our soul. I hope we cherish the freedom of our souls, the true freedom to listen to God's Word.

Father let us hear your voice today as you listen to us. Guide, care, protect, direct and govern us even in the midst of life's difficulties and let us give thanks together to our Almighty God. Amen.

Hyeeun Noh is a SAH/VST student, currently writing her thesis on Christian education for youth. She is expecting to study education in Canada and work for Korean Christian youth in the love of Christ.

Saturday, March 27

Psalm 118:1-2,19-29

*This is the Day that the Lord and Made
Let us Rejoice and be Glad in It*
זֶה יוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה נִגְלָה וְנִשְׁמַחַתָּה בּוֹ:

In August 2019, I moved from New Jersey to the Maritimes into a tiny home with a massive view of Grand Bay, NB. The sight of water and hills never ceases to catch me by surprise and fill me with delight. God made such beautiful things to nourish and restore our souls. Usually, the first thing I see in the morning is the sun rising over the bay – and Psalm 118:24 lingers with me – “this is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Each minister really has only one message that we just repackage each Sunday. In seminary, our job is to discover God’s message that we are to share with our congregations. Mine is a message of **defiant joy**. Because each day is made by God, imprinted with God’s holy word that set all creation spinning through the heavens, we are called to rejoice and be glad. We are called to face fiercely whatever chaos and evil that might arise with defiant joy because we too are made by God and belong to God.

At my ordination (over zoom) last October, I was surrounded by a circle of friends literally from around the globe who recited Psalm 118:24 for the call to worship as a reminder of God’s message of defiant joy. We counter the despair, depression, evil by breathing God’s joy and searching for the good assured that the darkness will not overcome God’s light given anew to us each morning. Let us rejoice and be glad.

Gracious God, your steadfast love endures forever. Be near me this day as I lift my prayers to you, that you might grant me grace and courage to face whatever the day may bring. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Susan Brasier is an ordained minister with the PC(USA). She is completing her coursework with St. Andrew’s Hall/VST in order to transfer into the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Prior to attending seminary, Susan served as a trial lawyer in Ohio while her raising three sons. She excels at banter, nagging, and making marvelous cookies.

Palm Sunday, March 28

Mark 11:1-11

“Ride on ride on in majesty, in lowly pomp ride on to die: O Christ, thy triumphs now begin O'er captive death and conquered sin.”

Jesus will not seize the reigns of power by brute force or shallow acclamation; this is “the Son of Man who came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.”

Dying on the cross, Jesus will deal with what ails us. On Palm Sunday, Jesus resists the temptation to skim the surface of human need. He won't get caught up in hero worship. He won't get lined up on one side against another. His power is his strength for us – for the whole of humanity.

He becomes vulnerable in love to change our fate at great cost to himself. This King is weak in power but strong in love. He takes on the world's pain and dies on a cross.

Our trouble goes deep; we need far more than personal safety and a stable economy. We need redemption, salvation, freedom from the sort of self-interest that enflames hatred, perpetuates conflict, the power to love our enemies, to work for reconciliation.

What we are after is not a national hero who will give our group *what it wants*, but one who will go to the cross to give the whole world *what it needs*.

Someone who can show us all how to risk following on the path of compassion and vulnerability, to imagine what it means to live lives whose first priority is love. In the week to come, God gives the world Jesus.

Blessed are you, Holy God, for in Jesus Christ you came to rule in our lives, as a humble servant, riding on a donkey. Enter into our hearts this day with your glory, that we may greet you with shouts of praise, through Christ, our Sovereign and Saviour. Amen.

Richard Topping is Principal of Vancouver School of Theology and is the St. Andrew's Hall Professor of Studies in the Reformed tradition.

Monday, March 29

Isaiah 42:1-9

*“I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.”*

“I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” (NRSV).

It is so scary and pathetic when we are transported to another place as forced labour or as slaves, we are deprived of our lives. That is the context of the life of the Israelites when they had to be transported as prisoners and slaves in Babylon written in the second Book of Isaiah. When the Israelites had to leave their house and land they were deprived of their life as a blessed people, they felt discouraged and thought that Yahweh had already lost control and power in the land of Babylon. They were like a bruised reed and a dimly burning wick that were about to die out.

In our brokenness, God does not leave us. The Creator shows Himself as a Powerful God that never loses His power over all of His creation, nations and rulers (V.5). God gives hope to those who are depressed and hopeless (V.7).

The coming of Jesus Christ as the Messiah is covenant hope to the people and a light to the nations. Jesus comes to free those who are shackled in sin and who live in darkness so that they may move towards a life of light. In and with Jesus we are led by God to fulfill this promise, so that our eyes are no longer blind, and we are free from captivity in a dark prison house.

In this uncertain, dark and frightening pandemic situation, the Word of God reminds us again that God never leaves us to fight alone, He is Immanuel. He cares about us and always be with us. We always need God in our circumstances. Let us come to God in prayer:

Gracious and Merciful God, we come to You in this uncertain situation, we know that You care about us. Deliver us from our darkness and confusion, give us peace so that we may enjoy Your presence and the power of your grace in Jesus Christ in our lives. Amen.

Arthur Surjadi is the former pastor of Faithful Presbyterian Church in Jakarta, Indonesia. He is a father and husband and is now studying at St. Andrew's Hall/VST.

Tuesday, March 30

Psalm 71: 1-14

“O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!”

Whenever I read the words of *Psalm 71*, I imagine the author to be someone in the midst of terror and helplessness. Phrases like: *“In you, O Lord, I take refuge,” “Rescue me, O God, from the hand of the wicked,”* and *“O God, do not be far from me”* paint a picture of one like a small, frightened child burying their face in their mother’s apron, hiding from the fearful things around them.

While this image, of the child hiding in refuge, tends to have negative connotations in our society (which sees little capital or utility in fear and hiding), the experience of being afraid is nevertheless universal.

The normal routines and events of life give us ample opportunity to be afraid: economic uncertainty, rumors of war, violence in the news, the illness of a loved one, the end of a relationship, each of these things prompts a reasonable reaction of fear: “what if things get worse?” “What if my deepest fears come true?” “What will I do?”

The author of *Psalm 71* knows what they will do. They will turn to the Lord for their protection and help. In describing their fear and their refuge, this author gives us a countercultural map to follow.

There is no shame in turning to God in fear (v. 1), God is trustworthy, he always has been (v. 5), God will not let us be put to shame, but will shame and scorn the victimizers instead (v. 13). Though the world may scorn the fearful, God will come close and be their refuge.

God our refuge, come close to us, make haste to help us, that when fear strikes, we would not hesitate to seek you. Amen.

Rev. Roberto DeSandoli is minister at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon. He loves preaching, pastoral care, and equipping the saints to do Christ’s mission in the world. He lives with his wife Heather and their cat Zoe.

Wednesday, March 31

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Sprints and Marathons. The image of the Christian life as a race is both exhilarating and intimidating. Our motivation for running this race is Jesus—what could be more compelling? And yet we know we don't measure up—we trip and stumble and get lost with distressing *frequency*. This race is a long, challenging affair.

It has become popular in planning church activities to distinguish between “sprint” and “marathon” events. Today we find people are not receptive to open-ended commitments. The conventional wisdom is that our invitations will meet with better response if we offer opportunities to participate in a series of sprints—short duration activities. “Would you like to join our Advent Bible Study—only five Wednesdays on Zoom?” I confess that this approach is more likely to produce a positive response from me!

And yet the race described in this passage—the Christian life—is a long-term commitment, marked by opposition and requiring discipline, drive, and perseverance from us. Truly a marathon.

While individual “chapters” of our life of obedience may appear as sprints, in reality they are connected together into one great marathon, as we run with perseverance the course set before us. We need not fear the long, lonely stretches ahead providing we keep our eyes on Jesus and trust him to be with us on the road ahead.

Lord Jesus, strengthen our resolve to keep our eyes focused on you, and help us rely on your presence with us as we run the race set before us.

Ian Rokeby is a Ruling Elder at Gordon Presbyterian Church in Burnaby, BC. He serves as Convenor of the St. Andrew's Hall Board. Ian is a professional engineer working in the transportation infrastructure sector. His hobbies include cycling, skiing, wood-working and camping. Ian and his wife Barbara have two adult sons.

Maundy Thursday, April 1

John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

"I give you a new commandment, ..."

What does the "new commandment" mean here? Jesus clearly did not undermine the Old Testament commandment to love others as oneself (Lev. 19:18). God's commands remain eternal in value (cf. Mt 5: 17-19). Jesus only made clear the true meaning of the commandment to love others.

The qualification of love in this new commandment is: "as Jesus loved the disciples" (13:34). Loving as Jesus did means showing faithfulness (13: 1 "now He loves them to the end"). This love also involves a humble attitude to serve others (13: 3-4). This love is also ready to accept the failures of others (13: 36-38). Above all, loving like Jesus means being willing to sacrifice for others (15: 12-13).

Our ability to love others is greatly influenced by our experience of Christ's love. If we understand how great Christ's love for us is, we will be able to share that great love with others.

To understand the greatness of love, we need to realize how sinful we are. The person who best understands their very serious sin before a holy God is the one who best understands how much love covers their sin. By sharing Christ's love with others, we are showing who our Great Teacher and Lord is to a waiting, watching world.

If love is the special sign (John 13:35) and the greatest thing in Christianity (Matt. 5: 23-24; 1Co 13), Christians must learn to put love above all else. Do not let us sacrifice love for things that are not important. Whatever happens, love should take priority over other activities in the ministry or certain spiritual gifts.

Dear Lord God, help us to always realize Your Great Love and share it with one another, Amen.

Astrid Melatunen is originally from Indonesia and is a student at Vancouver School of Theology and a much appreciated member of the St. Andrew's Hall Community.

Good Friday, April 2

John 18:1 – 19:42

“Shall I not drink from the cup that the Father has given me?”

God the Father is a Cupmaker. He once made a cup and gave it to his Son. John in this text portrays the cup, the cup of suffering that represents Jesus walking into the tomb. He already knew how painful his death would be.

Certainly, he understood who it was that gave the cup to him and why. Jesus also knew he must drink it. Therefore, he said to Peter, *“Shall I not drink from the cup that the Father has given me?”* (18:11). He emptied himself to fill his life with the will of the Father by taking the cup of the cross. Jesus’s calling was then fulfilled.

The cup taken by Jesus is a powerful symbol for other cups that the Father gives Jesus-followers who are sent out into the world. Apostles, early Christian believers, the later Church Fathers, and many more, all drank the cups of suffering on behalf of the gospel of Christ no matter how bitter the cups were at the time.

Even today, countless Christians bear their own cross to follow Jesus in diverse forms by enduring persecution, advocating for social justice, caring for the environment, or defending sound teachings against bad theologies.

Accordingly, it is very natural for Christians to go through hardships or strong opposition in following their callings in a hostile, anti-Christian culture.

You and I have been given a special cup from the Cupmaker, too. What is your cup? What is its intended purpose? Are you drinking it or trying to avoid it?

Lord, lead us from a too-comfortable lifestyle to a Spirit-led lifestyle even if it is costly so that we may fulfill the callings you give us and thus experience the power of the living gospel in our midst. Amen.

Rev. Young Tae Choi is a graduate of SAH/VST. He is the founding director of Poieo Center that nurtures artists, worship arts, and mainstream art. Young Tae is passionate about working at the intersection of art, ministry, and culture.

Holy Saturday, April 3

1 Peter 4:1-8

*The end of all things is near; therefore,
be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers.*

Throughout the letter of 1 Peter, I believe the apostle tried to teach us how to live our lives in the last days of salvation until Christ's return.

Our salvation is given by grace and is received by faith. Not only can we enjoy this generous gift but also, we should have ourselves focused on how to please God. God asks us to faithfully stay connected with Him. We are taught by the Bible that we should continue to pray and keep our mind and ears open to hear His voice and to discern His will. However, we get easily distracted by many issues in life, and it seems difficult to remain awake.

Jesus told his disciples at the garden of Gethsemane: "Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;" (Mark 32:38). The message is still clear for us today.

How often do we try to figure out what Jesus would do in a certain situation? This was one of my morning prayers, asking for wisdom and discernment for the day. Since early 2020 we have been living in an unpredictable era under the pandemic, and I suddenly started wondering how much time I made for prayers recently. It seems too difficult to find the reason why and how we are thrown into the predicament of the current pandemic, especially when we cannot find anything wrong in what we have done. Do we think we are suffering unjustly? Maybe. Nevertheless, I believe God still asks us to continue our prayers even in times of crisis and trial. As the Bible says, God wants to shape us in the way we should live. Through suffering, we are not punished but rather we are purified to be in full effect for His glory.

Help us, Lord, to be watchful and to keep praying to find your voice so we will not be tempted in this troubled and greedy world.

Mihye Park is the Housing Manager of the residence at St. Andrew's Hall, looking after daily administration of the housing office for residents/students and applicants.

Easter Sunday, April 4

John 20:1-18

*“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.
As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb...”*

The first ten verses of John’s resurrection narrative is frantic with activity. Mary Magdalene discovered the stone rolled away, and she runs to tell others. The disciples jump up and run back, only to be confused by the empty tomb and return home without understanding. But then, in verse 11, Mary simply lingers. She stays behind, weeping. Now, in the moment of deepest confusion God’s revelation takes hold.

Over the years as a congregational minister, I have found that after shaking hands at the backdoor of the church two kinds of people linger. First, those who have a complaint. They were upset by something in the service or the sermon. I always tried my best to cheerfully receive their feedback, after all I had lots of time to express my views in the sermon. The other kind of person who lingered was one who came to tell me a story. Something I said in the sermon, or a hymn we sang, or a prayer offered reminded them of the day Jesus found them, or the loving kindness of a grandparent, or a powerful revelation God had given them that day in the midst of the worship service.

Sometimes, when we linger and long for God to make sense of our confusing world, we receive a blessing. We are given a revelation from Father, Son and Holy Spirit regarding who we are and what we are to do as witnesses, standing in the dew-soaked grass of the garden tomb of our lives. Like Mary, we too can have a “chance” encounter with the gardener, Emmanuel.

I’ve had the privilege of leading many pilgrimage tours to Israel over the years. After touring the more historically accurate Church of the Holy Sepulchre (with all its religious “bling”), I usually end our time in the Holy Land with a visit to the more dubious “Garden Tomb” in east Jerusalem. There, in the oasis carved out in the midst of a busy, modern city, pilgrims gather for worship and we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. “This my body, this my blood.” In a garden in the city where Mary once lingered, surprised by the Saviour, these traditional words of Communion surprise us still, drawing us ever deeper into the mystery of the Word become flesh. Salvation at our fingertips in bread and wine. A revelation worth waiting for. A Lenten journey complete. A new life just begun.

Lord Jesus, risen in glory and shining with the light of eternity, we glorify you and worship you this Easter Sunday with humble hearts. Help us linger with you in this moment, that we too might delight in your goodness and witness to your glory wherever you lead us in the days ahead. Amen.

Ross Lockhart is Dean of St. Andrew’s Hall and Professor of Mission Studies at Vancouver School of Theology.

Notes



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