



**"Christ," watercolor by Cynthia Heine, 1982**

# **Daily Lenten devotions**

*A collaboration between members of Bethany Lutheran  
Church and Eagle Harbor Congregational Church*

February 14 through March 31, 2018

# Ash Wednesday, February 14

Dear God,

Thank you for forgiving my sins and sharing with me that daily moments of connection with you, God, can help me live in Grace and Peace.

I pray God that all of your people and all creation will come to you and walk with you on your path of righteousness. I ask that all of us will receive the fullness of joy in your presence.

Thank you God for sharing with us that if we are willing to be your hands and feet and be in partnership with you, great things can happen. I pray God that every day, all of your people will share your Love, Compassion and Joy with those around us. I pray that we will treat all people with dignity and justice and that this will bring an end to all wars, hunger and injustice.

Love,

DeMar Sather

# Thursday, February 15



## A poetic and musical meditation

Dear Creator,

Thank You: I am fortunate to live in this year, in this place, with my health, skills, knowledge, characteristics. Grateful!

Wow: Today I am mindful of the sun, of the still green grass, of the budding branches, of Creation as I read E. E. Cummings poetry (*next page*). Bountiful!

Help: I am aware that not everyone is so fortunate. Inspire me to notice and to support to friends, family and acquaintances who might be less than enthusiastic about today.

Sincerely, Alice Tawresey

Dear reader,

I offer this E.E. Cummings poem (first introduced to me by a friend) for readers of this letter. This poem was set to music by Eric Whitacre. If you would like a heightened experience, sing along with the recorded choral version of “i thank you go for most this amazing.”  
[youtube.com/watch?v=vGqmpa7gEGw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGqmpa7gEGw)

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth  
day of life and love and wings and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any-lifted from the no  
of all nothing-human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

E.E. cummings

## Friday, February 16

Dear God,

Thanks: Thank you for being a Listening God. In my distress I hear, “Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” and I know that I am heard and that I do not carry my burdens alone. I am grateful for prayer, and being part of a community of prayer, and for a God who listens, and heals.

Help: The list of those for whom I pray and for whom my heart aches seems to lengthen each day, and the severity of each concern intensifies. If I hear one more cancer diagnosis, if one more person falls and breaks a hip; when one more friend has their memory dim, one more report from

the hospital ... Your call to love our neighbor, along with the joy it is to have such friends, seem to conspire to weigh me down with anxiety and confusion and sadness. I look to you for compassion.

Wow: You have gifted me with care and concern for others. It is perhaps sometimes an unwelcomed gift because it can hurt to love so, but this is truly a gift. What a beautiful thing to have such relationships, a precious thing to know of such a God, who knows each of us by name and invites us into the work of Love.

Love,  
Paul Stumme-Diers

## Saturday, February 17

Holy God, Loving God, Healing God,

Your universe is so large, and I am so small. Even smaller yet is one part of me ... my hip. I thank you for all the parts of me that you have so wonderfully created. Yet, one chose to fail me this past year. That one began to ache, then began to hurt more, and finally was excruciatingly painful. Physical therapy provided flexibility and improved function for a brief while. I finally had to admit defeat and resort to medical intervention.

There is so much to thank you for. The gift of advanced medicine. Improved surgical techniques and artificial appliances. Skilled doctors and assistants. Kind, attentive nurses. Pain killing drugs: morphine, oxycodone, Tylenol. Yes, even those dangerous opioids. The dedicated care of my three daughters who decided to bring me home rather than get rehab at a facility. They not only were attentive to drug doses but lowered my bed to make it more accessible. They made appetizing meals for this post-surgical patient whose appetite disappeared for a few days. Aids to help me move around: walker and cane and more personal items that do not need to appear here. Home health care workers who did help me for a few days so my daughters could tend to family and jobs. People who brought meals and offered rides to worship.

There are people who have far more serious problems than one painful hip, and I lift them to you for your loving care, healing and comfort, for peace for those who approach a new side of life in your presence, and especially for those in the throes of grief.

You have made us in your image by giving us hearts to love others. Loving means feeling pain, too. May our hearts be broken by the things that break your heart. May those shared broken hearts nudge us to work for justice and bring healing and peace to a hurting world.

Love,  
Sonja Louise Hohertz Selboe

# Sunday, February 18

## Philippians 1:3-6 (Thanks)

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

# Monday, February 19

## Prompt #1 (Thanks)

Every day this week make a list of ten things (be specific) for which you are grateful, thus promoting gratitude as a way of life. Select a particular thing for which you are grateful (be specific) and compose a letter to the one who has helped you so appreciate it.

# Tuesday, February 20

Dearly beloved Creator,

Thank you with all my heart for calling me out of my stubborn darkneses. Thank you for being with me in the long night and reminding me to open my eyes to the bright morning. Thank you for teaching me to trust you. Thank you for pulling me back up when I stumble. Thank you for guiding me when I'm lost and lonely. Thank you for kindling the warmth of steadfast love in me when my spirit is chilled to the bone by our human misbehavior.

Dear Lord, it's so hard to be human, both filled with awe and deeply flawed, unable to be the people we want to be. Beloved, we continue to polarize so many issues, setting ourselves in opposition to each other and of course to you as well, while we think we are doing your will. We all seem convinced that we fully understand what you want of us and act accordingly, yet we're horrified by each other's words and actions (and sometimes by our own as well). Please help us to listen as Jesus listened, to see each other face-to-face and truly hear each other. Please open our hearts to your boundless compassion and open our minds to your loving kindness, that we may be transformed and healed.

Beloved, I see your hand in trees and clouds, in birds and flowers, in mountains and rivers and my hard heart is melted. I see your eyes in my children and grandchildren and recognize them again as a homeless man or wandering woman struggling with mental illness. Thank you for being such a brilliant, endlessly creative creator. Your amazing creation is so complex, so varied, so incredibly detailed that your world fills me with delight. The hills really do clap their hands in

joy, and the oceans sing your name day and night. It's heartening to remember that you knew us before we were born and you love us far more than we can comprehend. My favorite part is that you see us and know us and you love us anyway. Thank you.

Love,  
Ann Lovejoy

## **Wednesday, February 21**

### **“Good Teachers” by Herb Brokering**

Throughout my school years I would wait to meet my teachers.

From country elementary schools through several graduate schools, I do not recall a bad teacher. They were different, each teacher like one piece of a great puzzle. And it was up to me to fit the pieces together for learning.

We talked about your teachers, met them, counseled with them through the years, thanked them, and sometimes took them to task. I envied the amount of your lives they spent with you, and the topics and feelings you shared with them – things I never knew about. They represented your parents, and in some ways the represented God to you. They were the guardians of your mind, of your future.

Some challenged you when you threw a square pot on a round potter's wheel, and you learned with them that you were unique, an inventor. Some drove you to practice for perfection; with them you learned to emulate a great mind, a compassionate heart. Some taught you to argue inside yourself and to look at everything from many sides – like Picasso, and your spirit grew. Some were a trial for you; through them, too, you discovered who you are.

You have remembered all of them. Some you have thanked.

Do you remember my stories about the professor who taught me that a word is a world. I was 19 then, and his course was called “Form Criticism.” Thirty-five years later, I read that he'd died. I wrote his widow a letter telling her of my thanks and admiration of this great mentor. I poured out gratitude as to a best friend. I also thanked her for her father, another professor, who that same year had taught me a course on the life of Christ. He was tall and gentle, and he leaned over us with love when he talked about Jesus. He taught as though he were an eyewitness, as though he had walked those ancient Judean roads, Galilean hillsides and deserts himself. I thanked her for her father's reverent imagination. It felt good to give thanks for these teachers.

Thirty years ago I began teaching courses of creative education in seminaries. Students are now writing me, remembering when we sat on teeter-totters and spoke words that balanced, recalling how we walked downtown by twos with eyes closed to learn trust. We loved learning together. Everyone got a passing grade.

You remember teachers by name. I remember Mr. Hertel. He recruited me for college – not to play football or for a scholarship, just to go to Wartburg College in Iowa. He drove 300 miles to

our country parsonage and asked me to come to his college. We could not afford college, but he said I could earn my way by washing dishes, waiting tables, raking leaves, washing windows and walls. That is what I did, and I often thanked him. He taught biology; coached basketball, baseball, football; and was our dorm master. His eyes were cast down whenever we met him, but in his shy spirit he knew everything about us. When the band played during basketball games, there were one tune we all loved. To the beat of that tune we sang the word "Hertel!" We sang it with love.

I do not remember ever having a bad teacher. I thought they were supposed to be the way they were. There was always something important to learn from each of them. Sometimes it was just to live through the hours of class. That was something good. So it will always be with those who are teachers, colleagues, friends. All have things to teach, good things.

When we saw the film "The Crucible," you told me how you directed the play in Tokyo. For two hours we talked about the meaning of this film for America and for students in Japan. I thanked you then. I thank you again in this letter for being my teacher. I thank God for your mind and spirit.

Years pass, our teachers change. We learn from each of them.

Love, Dad

## Thursday, February 22

My wife, Claire, and I were at the bus shelter on Highway 305 waiting to catch bus 90 to the ferry terminal on Bainbridge. We had read the bus schedule carefully, but still unsure, we arrived at the stop 15 minutes early. We finally saw the bus coming up the highway, but as it got closer we could see a big **Sorry** sign on the front of the bus. "That's not our bus," I said to Claire, "that's the *sorry bus*." We looked closely to see if anyone was on the bus, but it looked empty except for the driver. That's when we started wondering about the *sorry bus*.

Where does the *sorry bus* go? Does the *sorry bus* ever stop for anyone? These thoughts provoked other questions. Who rides that bus? Who should be on it? Claire thought this year it would be picking up a lot of men.

Lent is a season of repentance. It is spring housecleaning for the soul. For many it means giving up something to demonstrate mastery over the things of the flesh. Joel invites us to "rend your hearts and not your garments." The great penitential Psalm 51, often read on Ash Wednesday, proclaims: "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Another Lenten injunction: "Bear fruit worthy of repentance," cries John the Baptist. In Romans 2:4 Paul tells us it is God's kindness that encourages us to get on the bus. "Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

Maybe the *sorry bus* is our bus and we need to be on it. It could take us in a new direction.

Marty Dasler

## Friday, February 23

Dear God,

What do I know except to be alive? And yet, the amazing gift of over 60 years of life is that slowly I am gaining the capacity to see the miracle that is experience experienced. “Life is rich,” which is not to say easy or even always pleasant, though I also see how pleasant and easy my life is in comparison to many others’. To experience self-pitying tears, rapt engagement, placid contemplation, paralyzing anxiety, intense affection, awe, and oh so many more emotions – I’ve come to see this as a gift. Whether or not my benefits are mere good fortune, they afford the opportunity of perspective. I am thankful for perspective.

The old joke about blithely planning to live forever (“so far, so good”) is balanced by the poignancy that my lived experience is time-limited: if I have any chance of finding the eternal in the temporal, I must begin immediately to seek it. Please help me see the nooks and crannies of compassion, the thin spaces and liminal borders of connection. Help me be open to the universe and feel the flow of undergirding love undergirding. Maybe I’ll need to wait until I’m dying to know the release of giving up my self, but help me see intimations of the immortality that letting go of me and embracing all may bring.

I don’t know what to make of this terrible world: a brilliant spectacle full of grace and fear. I am often unmoored by tight meanness and brittle selfishness. But also, I am often deeply touched by sweet kindness and gentle generosity. What to make of this unfathomable universe? Awe, mostly.

Love,  
Reed Price

## Saturday, February 24

Dear God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit,

### THANKS:

For family celebration

- my sister’s gracious
- loving life

For far flung

- family members

For my sister’s

- 76<sup>th</sup> birthday today

**HELP:**

For family

- suicide attempt
- counselors
- prayer

For community

- church
- fellow volunteers
- prayer

For world

- people
- environment
- prayer

**WOW:**

For all you do

- forgiveness of my transgressions
- I lift up my soul in song and word

Peace,  
Gail

## Sunday, February 25

### Romans 12:9-21 (Advocacy)

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

# Monday, February 26

## Prompt #2 (Thanks)

Bread for the World is a Christian advocacy organization that encourages letter writing (Offering of Letters”) to elected officials to promote programs that fight hunger. This year their campaign is “For such a time as this.” More information can be found at [bread.org](http://bread.org).

# Tuesday, February 27

Dear God and Creator,

Thank you for Your gifts to feed our souls. From Psalm 107:1, 9, “O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.” “For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”

You have provided food and drink for us, but Earth needs our help. Please guide us to protect our home, that we may lose these gifts for our journey. It too often feels that we are too late or that there are too many forces against us. Please help us find the strength to protect and help our human and animal brothers and sisters, the skies, the air, the land, and the waters which You provided through Your love for us. Keep our hope strong.

The natural world around us truly satisfies my thirst when my spirit feels drained and erases my hunger when my soul is despairing, whether through times of painful loss or illness; sadness over the fate of the poor and vulnerable, victims of war and persecution, environmental destruction; or despair at the future of our planet’s climate. Thank you for the gift of this beautifully glorious Earth and all its creation therein. One cannot truly see it without marveling at its beauty and miracle – and feel your love and strength – and hope.

*The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.*

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Please grant us the wisdom to see your everyday gifts of food and drink for our souls, and the wisdom to protect them. Let every bird, blossom, rock, and raindrop serve as a reminder of Your grace.

Love,  
Christine Perkins

## Wednesday, February 28

*From a letter written by Elizabeth Blackwell, a pioneering woman doctor in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, to her mother while she was teaching school in a slave state before obtaining her medical degree:*

5 March 1844

Dear Mother,

I dislike slavery more and more every day. I suppose I see it in its mildest form, and since my residency here I have heard of no use being made of the whipping post, nor any instance of downright cruelty. But to live in the midst of beings degraded to the utmost in body and mind, drudging on from earliest morning to latest night, cuffed about by everyone, scolded at all day long, blamed unjustly, and without spirit enough to reply, with no consideration in any way for their feelings, with no hope for the future. To live in their midst, utterly unable to help them, is to me dreadful. The mistresses pique themselves on the advantageous situation of their blacks; they positively think them very well off, and triumphantly compare their position with that of the poor in England and other countries. I endeavor, in reply, to slide in a little truth through the small apertures of their minds, for were I to come out broadly with my simple, honest opinion I should shut them up tight, arm all their prejudices, and do ten times more harm than good.

*From an 1846 letter written by Lucy Stone, suffragist and abolitionist in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, to her mother:*

I know, Mother, you feel badly about the plans I have proposed for myself, and that you would prefer to have me take some other course, if I could in conscience. Yet, Mother, I know you too well to suppose that you would wish me to turn away from what I think is my duty, and go all my days in opposition to my convictions of right, lashed by a reproaching conscience.

If I would be true to myself, true to my Heavenly Father, I must be actuated by high and holy principles, and pursue that course of conduct which, to me, appears best calculated to promote the highest good of the world. Because I know I shall suffer, shall I for this, like Lot's wife, turn back? No, Mother, if in this hour of the world's need I should refuse to lend my aid, however small it may be, I should have no right to think myself a Christian, and I should forever despise Lucy Stone. If, which I hear the wild shriek of the slave mother robbed of her little ones, or the muffled groan of the daughter spoiled of her virtue, I do not open my mouth for the dumb, am I not guilty?

You would not object, or think it wrong, for a man to plead the cause of the suffering and the outcast; and surely the moral character of the act is not changed because it is done by a woman. But Mother, there are not trials so great as they who suffer who neglect or refuse to do what they believe is their duty. I expect to plead not for the slave only, but for suffering humanity everywhere. ESPECIALLY TO I MEAN TO LABOR FOR THE ELEVATION OF MY SEX. I only ask that you will not withhold your consent from my doing anything that I think it is my duty to do. You will not, will you, Mother?

# Thursday, March 1

Dear Gracious God,

You love us unconditionally and we can never thank you enough for that. You are Lord over every situation, no matter how difficult it may seem. You are Healer and will never waste the grief we carry.

But there are too many of them. People who are ill, hurting or lonely. People who are hungry or in need of a warm bed. People who are abused, uncared for, or unloved. We can't take care of all these people – of ourselves – and it feels overwhelming. Forgive us for thinking you've forgotten us. Thank you that in the midst of it all, you haven't left us to fend for ourselves.

We pray for the peace of your presence to cover our minds and thoughts. We thank you for your love which will reach into every corner to find us. We take comfort knowing we are safe with you forever. Even when we doubt, we are thankful that your thoughts are bigger than our thoughts.

We lay all our burdens and cares down at your feet and the foot of the cross. That feels like the safest place for them to be. Thank you for the ability to breathe again.

In Jesus name we humbly pray, Amen.

Linda Newlon

# Friday, March 2

Dear God,

**Thanks:** When I think about offering thanks to you, God, I feel like an Academy Award winner. You know, the one who is fumbling through index cards to remember all the folks he wants to thank for his opportunities. There is not enough time or paper in this world to capture a complete list of specific items worthy of thanks for your gifts. So, how about this – Thank you for providing the opportunity for me to experience the wonderment of your creation; for your support in my trials and successes; and for always being a listening ear when the complications of life bring questions that seem beyond the means of any earthly answers. I know you listen, because after a day of turmoil, the next day always brings a fresh sunrise and an air of hope offering a clean slate for the future.

**Help:** I pray for myself and others to fully envelope indiscriminate compassion and love. I've always believed the "love your neighbor" call is truly your key directive. There are moments in each day during which I struggle to maintain this goal. I find myself unconsciously discriminating against my neighbor. Please, help me to bring this discrimination into my

thoughtful consciousness and give me the tools to apply the unlimited vastness of your loving hand to actually and fully love my neighbors.

Concerns about the welfare of the world as a whole, my country as a part, and my fellow living beings as a day-to-day connection to your creation has the unfortunate consequence – at least in myself – of adding a degree of undesirable anxiety. Continue to offer your peaceful reassurance that although my anxiety may be well deserved, it is building an unnecessary obstacle to finding solutions.

**Wow:** Your gift of life continues to amaze me as I stumble through my small fraction of this age in the world you created. I love that you remind me of that creation, in some part, every day of my life – the sound of a baby’s laughter on the ferry, the wild call of a coyote at night, a sudden downpour of rain followed by a just-as-sudden flash of blinding sunlight. Your humor makes me warm inside. As much as we pretend to control our destiny, I think we don’t even realize or have the ability to know our true destiny ... but you do!

Thanks much – have a great spring, and keep our lights shining!

Love,  
David Beemer

## Saturday, March 3

Wait for it....

Here we are in the middle of these 40 days of the Lenten Season 2018, waiting, hoping, longing for Easter. In our upper part of the northern hemisphere the hours and minutes of daylight are lengthening and producing welcome signs of the season of spring. In the midst of these signs the liturgical calendar calls us into the solemn season of Lent, at first a seeming contrast.

In Lent we are invited/called by all those who have gone before us in faith and by our own previous Lenten journeys into a preparation of our lives for celebration, an emptying of the many preoccupations that prevent us from perceiving God’s life-giving presence and from anticipating and celebrating God’s redeeming of all of God’s creation in the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

As we journey through this season our waiting for the celebration to come need not be a passive exercise, a temporary giving up of our comforting or obsessive habits. In whatever circumstances we find ourselves, losses, sorrows, disappointments, uncertainty, joys thankfulness, clarity, and all the places in between, the psalmist whose prayerful song cries out for God’s ear in Psalm 130 gives us a roadmap and an attitude with which to make our way.

His song comes from down in “the depths.” declaring that he is “WAITING for the Lord.” This waiting entails placing his hope for rescue in God. He clearly states the reason for his choice: “in God’s word is HOPE” and repeats again later in his song that his whole being is waiting for the Lord, in hope of accompaniment in the midst of “the depths.” The psalmist urges all people to place their foundational hope in the God who does not disappoint. Why? Because of who God

has shown God's self to be: "there is forgiveness (reshaped relationship) with you (God) ... there is steadfast love and with God great power to redeem" (God's process of reclaiming the wholeness, completeness of God's creation of which we are an intimate part.)

Returning to our own Lenten journeys in 2018, we on this side of God's redeeming of creation in Christ know the story that the psalmist could only anticipate in general. And yet we like the psalmist are continually reminded of the righteous, merciful, redeeming, steadfast nature of God which inspires our hope as we too actively await completion of God's reclaiming of creation. May our Lenten journeys continue to be infused with God's presence. And then may we, God's waiting, hopeful people, be God's steadfast servants in God's world – bringing God's love.

Helen Stoll

## **Sunday, March 4**

### **2 Corinthians 9:11-12 (Generosity)**

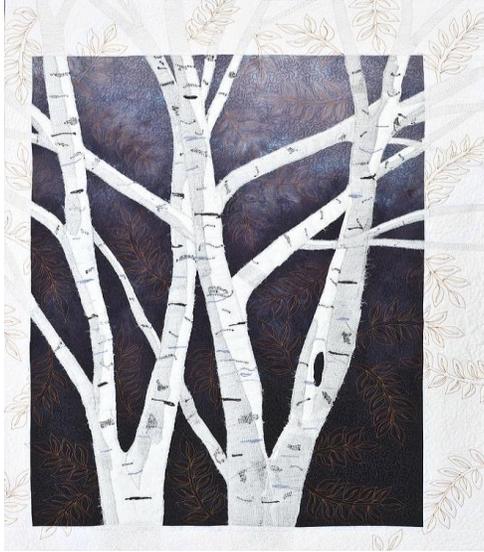
You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

## **Monday, March 5**

### **Prompt #3 (Generosity)**

Elana Zaiman, in her book "The Forever Letter" provides this prompt: "What are the 10 most important objects in your life? Did you acquire these objects on your own, or were they given to you?" To this we add, "Who, in cherishing an object in their life, would look to you as being the one who helped them appreciate it?" Write a note to the person who so generously shared with you.

## Tuesday, March 6



Dear God,

**THANKS:** for creating us as “pack animals,” as people who need people. I am so thankful for the web of relationships that connect, surround and hold me. I’m so thankful that your Love pulses through these myriad relationships whether or not we acknowledge your Big Love as the wellspring of our smaller loves. I thank you for weaving us into communities and thank you that the thread of your great and indestructible love is part of this great tapestry. Is this what the psalmist meant when they wrote “you hem me in, behind and before...?” (Psalm 139:5) Thank you for my church, for my extended family, for my friends, for my neighbors, for my community, for those folk I only know through the window of the computer. They all make me who I am. They all make my life interesting, enjoyable and meaningful.

**HELP:** It feels like our social fabric is frayed in this nation I love. It feels like the threads between our nation and our global neighbors are strained and tearing in some places. We need your help in recognizing the beautiful and mysterious ways we are woven together. We need your help in learning to respect the great Web of Life that links all living beings. We too easily forget that we are not so much independent as interdependent. Help us feel the tug of all the threads of creation not as obligations or constrictions but as openings through which we expand the reach of our hearts, minds, and souls.

Help us be weavers and menders along with you where we see relationships torn and frayed.

**WOW:** I learned recently that trees are in communion with one another in ways similar to human communities, that they communicate with each other and support each other and contribute to each other’s health through their roots. Wow! I want my roots to be so intertwined

with the roots of others that we become true blessings to one another, with a clear understanding of how the health of the community strengthens the health of each one of us.

Dee Eisenhauer, Eagle Harbor Congregational United Church of Christ

## Wednesday, March 7

*Excerpt from "Letters and Papers from Prison" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jan. 17, 1945:*

Dear parents,

I'm also writing today because of the People's sacrifice. I would like to ask you to take complete control of my things. I'm told that even a dinner jacket would be accepted; please give mine away; also a 'pepper and salt' suit which is too small for me and a pair of brown shoes; you, mother, now know better than I do what I still have. In short, give away whatever anyone might need, and don't give it another thought. If you have any doubts about anything, you might perhaps telephone Commissar Sondeeregger! The last two years have taught me how little we can get along with ... In the inactivity of a long imprisonment one has above all a great need to do whatever is possible for the general good within the narrow limits that are imposed. You'll be able to understand that. When one thinks how many people lose everything each day, one really has no claim on possessions of any kind. I know that you think the same way, and only want to play my part. Is HansWalter actually flying in the East now? And Renate's husband? Thank you very much for your letter, and thank Maria *very* much for her Christmas letter! I read my letters here till I know them by heart.

## Thursday, March 8

*From "Children's Letters to God" by Hample and Marshall*

Dear God,

Who draws the lines around the countries?

Nan

# Friday, March 9

Dear God,

I think of you as the ultimate reality in the universe, with a vision of that reality that I hope will lead humanity to goals like goodness, beauty, compassion, empathy, and concern for the happiness and well-being of everyone. I think of you as calling all of us to follow you as the lure toward beauty, and truth where truth includes justice, equality, autonomy, personal agency, personal satisfaction and universal peace, happiness, and love for ourselves and all others. I hope that together we will strive to value each and every person as being utterly unique and of infinite value. You can touch our hearts and keep us engaged in the struggle. It is you who can keep us focused on all people, on their problems, challenges, weakness, personal concerns fears, but also their hopes and desires, leading toward healing, wholeness, and relief from pain and suffering. There is a road that leads to fulfilling your vision and goals, and we need to be on it. Even if we aren't sure where we are going and why, the notion that we, others with us here and now, and those who have been on the road before us leading the way, will accomplish what you have called us to do and to be. We each need to be one of that number – the pilgrims on that great journey. With your help we will find that road and that great multitude that travels on it, and It is you who can lead us there. If you provide the vision and the motivation we provide the means, the human power to bring the vision into being, to make it a reality in the fullest possible way. With you dwelling in our hearts and minds we can see and feel your presence, so that we can know how to determine and work toward achieving your purposes in the pursuit of justice and peace. And by sharing our thoughts and convictions with others we may find clarity of vision and the strength and courage to continue on that road, to pick ourselves up – to recover when we falter or are weary, when we feel we are losing hope.

We are grateful that with you as our guide we can work for the possibility of a world where each and every person is cared for and valued. For it is you who can call us to follow the road that leads to a world of justice and peace. Then we may become the kind of folk who will work toward that just and peaceful world, who will carry out the actions required for achieving that world, and then we may become your good and faithful servants.

Love,  
Don Wilson

# Saturday, March 10

*From "Children's Letters to God" by Hample and Marshall:*

Dear God,

Thank you for the baby brother but what I prayed for was a puppy.

Joyce

# Sunday, March 11

## **2 Corinthians 5:11-21 (Reconciliation)**

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

# Monday, March 12

## Prompt #4 (Reconciliation)

In the novel *Demian: The Story of Emil Sinclair's Youth*, Hermann Hesse wrote: "If you hate a person, you hate something in him that is a part of yourself. What isn't a part of ourselves doesn't disturb us." Even when we don't hate another, we can be bothered by things that person says or does. So try this. What bothers you about the person you are writing to? Make a list. When you've completed that list, circle the words that bother you about yourself. Ask yourself if there is any way you can be kinder toward and less judgmental of yourself. Can you carry this kindness over to the person to whom you are writing? (Elana Zaiman)

# Tuesday, March 13

Dear God:

My congregation asked us to write a letter to you as a Lenten devotional. They suggested we pray to you for help, thank you and declare with a "Wow" our deep gratitude to you. This is a very hard letter to write. I am a sceptic and very likely agnostic. Unlike most of humanity, I do not have a metaphysical world view. So writing to God is very much like writing a letter to an imaginary friend. But, the suggested prayer format led me to wonder whether and to whom I actually "pray" (with air quotes around the word prayer) for help, give thanks and express gratitude. I was astonished! I offer prayers to others. I don't do it with much intention but more as a spontaneous expression of hope: "I hope my wife will help me get through a difficult day, thanks to my son for giving me a huge hug on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and "Wow!, a friend just gave me great advice to help me deal with chronic pain. I am so grateful to him." And so, I don't imagine you as a disembodied being standing apart from your creation. If there is a singular divine presence, I only know you through your creation. And so, this letter is a prayer to my family, my friends, my congregation and my community.

I am so deeply grateful to my wife for helping me through countless difficult days and nights. I am grateful to her for taking me out of my comfort zone and dragging me to Seattle 20 years ago from Chicago. I offer thanks to my son for actually helping me grow up. He taught me that it rarely ever helps to overreact and that reflection before acting will always result in a better outcome.

Thanking my friends is a joy for me. My close friends Russ, Tom and Beau have given to me graciously over and over and over again, without judgment or expecting to receive something in return.

My 91-year-old father wants me to be tender and gentle with him, explains that I can't rush things and says very few things are really worth getting all that worked up about. Wow, wisdom really does come with age!

A huge "Wow" to my friends at Cross Sound Church who, while vastly more orthodox than me, don't just talk about the Gospel but live it out in real and lasting service to the poor and the suffering. They invited me into service with them and allowed me to experience the liberating sensation to be able to exclaim, as I stepped off the bus in Tijuana: "I am not here for myself!" That's a mind-blowing experience.

And a new "Wow" to my friends at Eagle Harbor Congregational Church, who are astoundingly radical in their embrace of the Gospel for justice and the common good. It is equally liberating to know that there are others close by who want to change things and actually set about doing it.

And while the larger community in which I reside is vast and often unknown to me, I am overwhelmed with awe that they arise to care for the sick and elderly, come to our aid in times of profound distress and danger and collect and dispose of the island's garbage each week. It seems like such mundane work but without those who attend to the ordinary (or really extraordinary) tasks that make any community possible, I am certain our community would quickly crumble. So, help me loving Family; Help me my dear Friends; Help me inspired Church and Community. Dear God, . . . help . . . us . . . all.

Greg Diamond

## Wednesday, March 14

*Excerpts from a "A Letter to American Christians" sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Ala., Nov. 4, 1956.*

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to you who are in America, grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

For many years I have longed to see you. I have heard so much of you and of what you are doing. I have heard of the fascinating and astounding advances that you have made in the scientific realm. I have heard of your dashing subways and flashing airplanes. Through your scientific genius you have been able to dwarf distance and place time in chains. You have been able to carve highways through the stratosphere. So in your world you have made it possible to eat breakfast in New York City and dinner in Paris, France. I have also heard of your skyscraping buildings with their prodigious towers steeping heavenward. I have heard of your great medical advances, which have resulted in the curing of many dread plagues and diseases, and thereby prolonged your lives and made for greater security and physical well-being. All of that is marvelous. You can do so many things in your day that I could not do in the Greco-Roman world of my day. In your age you can travel distances in one day that took me three

months to travel. That is wonderful. You have made tremendous strides in the area of scientific and technological development.

But America, as I look at you from afar, I wonder whether your moral and spiritual progress has been commensurate with your scientific progress. It seems to me that your moral progress lags behind your scientific progress. Your poet Thoreau used to talk about “improved means to an unimproved end.” How often this is true. You have allowed the material means by which you live to outdistance the spiritual ends for which you live. You have allowed your mentality to outrun your morality. You have allowed your civilization to outdistance your culture. Through your scientific genius you have made of the world a neighborhood, but through your moral and spiritual genius you have failed to make of it a brotherhood. So America, I would urge you to keep your moral advances abreast with your scientific advances.

I am impelled to write you concerning the responsibilities laid upon you to live as Christians in the midst of an unChristian world. That is what I had to do. That is what every Christian has to do. But I understand that there are many Christians in America who give their ultimate allegiance to man-made systems and customs. They are afraid to be different. Their great concern is to be accepted socially. They live by some such principle as this: “everybody is doing it, so it must be alright.” For so many of you Morality is merely group consensus. In your modern sociological lingo, the mores are accepted as the right ways. You have unconsciously come to believe that right is discovered by taking a sort of Gallup poll of the majority opinion.

American Christians, I must say to you as I said to the Roman Christians years ago, “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” You have a dual citizenry. You live both in time and eternity. Your highest loyalty is to God, and not to the mores or the folkways, the state or the nation, or any manmade institution. If any earthly institution or custom conflicts with God’s will, it is your Christian duty to oppose it. You must never allow the transitory, evanescent demands of man-made institutions to take precedence over the eternal demands of the Almighty God. In a time when men are surrendering the high values of the faith you must cling to them, and despite the pressure of an alien generation preserve them for children yet unborn. You must be willing to challenge unjust mores, to champion unpopular causes, and to buck the status quo. You are called to be the salt of the earth. You are to be the light of the world You are to be that vitally active leaven in the lump of the nation.

American Christians, you may master the intricacies of the English language. You may possess all of the eloquence of articulate speech. But even if you “speak with the tongues of man and angels, and have not love, you are become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”

You may have the gift of scientific prediction and understand the behavior of molecules, you may break into the storehouse of nature and bring forth many new insights, you may ascend to the heights of academic achievement, so that you have all knowledge, and you may boast of your great institutions of learning and the boundless extent of your degrees; but, devoid of love, all of these mean absolutely nothing.

But even more, Americans, you may give your goods to feed the poor, you may bestow great gifts to charity, and you may tower high in philanthropy, but if you have not love, your charity

means nothing. You may even give your body to be burned, and die the death of a martyr, and your spilled blood may be a symbol of honor for generations yet unborn, and thousands may praise you as one of history's supreme heroes; but even so, if you have not love, your blood is spilled in vain. You must come to see that a man may be self-centered in his self-denial and self-righteous in his self-sacrifice. His generosity may feed his ego and his piety his pride. Without love, benevolence becomes egotism and martyrdom becomes spiritual pride.

The greatest of all virtues is love. Here we find the true meaning of the Christian faith and of the cross. Calvary is a telescope through which we look into the long vista of eternity and see the love of God breaking into time. Out of the hugeness of his generosity God allowed his only-begotten Son to die that we may live. By uniting yourselves with Christ and your brothers through love you will be able to matriculate in the university of eternal life. In a world depending of force, coercive tyranny, and bloody violence, you are challenged to follow the way of love. You will then discover that unarmed love is the most powerful force in all the world.

## Thursday, March 15

Dear abundant and generous God,

We give you thanks for the amazing natural world that is all around us – for newly formed blooms of Daphne which pierce the still-winter air with spicy fragrance, for rosy-tinged clouds that fill the view of the sky from my window, for the tiny brown creeper that can barely be seen as he hops up a Douglas fir and then flutters back down, for the flamboyant moon that casts shadows on midnight fields, and for the barely moving river that reflects the soft, gray light of an early morning. The wonders all around us remind us that creation was not a one-time event that took place eons ago but is an unfolding process that is happening all around us every minute of every day.

...and God saw that the light was good. Genesis 1:4

Dear kind and compassionate God,

The world is divided and wounded. So many are hurting. People are afraid, lonely and in pain. There are those without decent homes, those who feel unwelcome, those whose voices are not heard. It is so hard to know what to do and how to make a difference. We humbly pray for guidance and courage. We ask that you show us the path and that you give us the strength to take it. Help us to remember that no matter how difficult our journey may be we are never alone. You are always present. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another about yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Romans 12:9-13

Dear mysterious and luminous God,  
We are in awe of your terrifying power. Your timeless and boundless presence is incomprehensible to us. We may study the world around us but our understanding and knowledge remains limited, flawed, small. We are frightened by the vastness of your wisdom but we are comforted as well. There is no god but God. But Yahweh was not in the hurricane. And after the hurricane, an earthquake. But Yahweh was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, fire. But Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire, a still small voice. 1 Kings 19:11b-12

Barbara Deines

## Friday, March 16

Dear God,

I know You didn't create the liturgical season of Lent – You left that to the early leaders of your Christian Church – but let me just say I am thankful for it! Those leaders associated Lent with the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness – following his baptism – facing a tempting devil and preparing for his ministry; I associate Lent with a time of consciously acknowledging my less-than-laudatory attitudes and behaviors and of consciously trying harder to be the kind of person I think You are encouraging me to be. Of course I'm far from perfect at doing this, but for 40-plus days I try to pay more-than-normal attention to the dark side of my psyche, and I try to foster a habit or two that helps me feel better about how I am in the world.

In facing the dark side of my psyche – or for that matter the dark side of our world – I take comfort from, find solace in, the words of poets and sages. My friend Roger recently sent me two poems that are particularly timely in reminding me to not be afraid of the dark.

Says David Whyte in his poem *Sweet Darkness*: “When your eyes are tired/the world is tired also./When your vision has gone/no part of the world can find you./Time to go into the dark/where night has eyes/to recognize its own./There you can be sure/you are not beyond love.

And, says Rainer Maria Rilke in his poem *You Darkness*: “You darkness from which I come,/I love you more than all the fires/that fence out the world,/for the fire makes a circle/for everyone/so that no one sees you anymore./But darkness holds it all:/the shape and the flame,/the animal and myself,/how it holds them,/all powers, all sight–/and it is possible: its great strength/is breaking into my body./I have faith in the night.”

Often these days after dinner I take a night walk or sit for a while on my front porch with the porch light off. I am awed by the creatures – domesticated and not – who scurry and flap in front of my path, by the rustling of foliage in the wind and rain, by clouds parting to let the moon and stars show themselves. I have a glimpse, in these dark times, that me and my sins and sorrows,

that the world and its sins and sorrows, are far from all there is. Trite or ironic as it may sound, in these dark times I experience comfort and solace in feeling that I am but a very small part in your apparently never-ending creation.

So, here's to Lent!

Love,  
Jennifer Merrill

## **Saturday, March 17**

### **Joseph, Guardian of Jesus**

Dear God, Loving Parent of all,

#### **THANKS**

You have made us in your image. You gave Joseph the eyes and heart to see Mary, his beloved – who carried a child that wasn't his – as worthy of his ongoing commitment. That child became a Light for the world, our Savior. Thank you for people like Joseph, faithful to your call to love and grace.

#### **WOW**

My great grandfather, Jacob, was an immigrant to Wisconsin from Luxembourg. He was a young farmer, a widower, who somehow met and married my German immigrant great grandmother Barbara. She was a widow with a 3-year-old boy and a 2-week-old girl when they married. Jacob also showed love and grace, and one result is generations of grateful descendants.

#### **HELP**

Help us to look past outward appearances of others to see the souls that you so lovingly created. We all have burdens and need the acceptance of others. Help us to follow the examples of Jesus, and Joseph, in looking deep and responding to all in need of your love and grace.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Alice McCain

# **Sunday, March 18**

## **2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (Consolation)**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

# **Monday, March 19**

## **Prompt #5 (Consolation)**

Sometimes, when words are hard to form and feelings difficult to express, perhaps the writing of a letter might take the shape of a picture. “(A) man told me that when his mother was in the hospital and unable to speak, she drew a picture that resembled a tree. He asked her questions about that tree. Questions such as, “Mom, is this a tree? Are you drawing a tree because you want us to have children? To grow spiritually? To have deep roots? In response to his questions she would nod. It was through this drawing that she passed on her values. (Elana Zaiman)

# **Tuesday, March 20**

Spirit of Love,

I come to you with immense gratitude for all the gifts of life, especially those in the last several years, of strength and energy to do the difficult work I am often called to do. The gifts of family and home, of connection to my community, and of safety and warmth have carried me through. And my gratitude for these gifts is present to me always and brings me such joy. And I am grateful to feel this gratitude! And to be present to life and all its blessings.

And this gratitude is present even in the midst of so much suffering. I ask your help and intercession for those who are victims of violence, of oppression. Those who are silenced and ignored. Those who feel lost and alone, in a world that treats them as if they are worthless. May they feel your presence and know they are inherently worthy. May they feel the spirit of love surrounding them. And may they encounter small blessings to carry them through the hard times. And especially for those who govern this country, whose hearts are frozen, and whose fear has blinded them, may they know the meaning of love and trust. Help them to realize they have the

power to do good, for this planet and its people. May they turn from selfish desires and toward generosity. May they hear the call of love and justice and answer it bravely.

In my own life I have seen the miracle of your presence. In every person I meet, I see the spark of your love. On this beautiful planet, all the ways you manifest and bring joy and abundance. And I am forever in awe of those who work so hard to protect this planet, to advocate for its people, and to do the work of building covenantal community. The depth of love you offer astounds me. And I rest in knowing we are all surrounded by this love and we are never cast out or turned away. What an unimaginable blessing. I thank you for this and for your steady presence always.

Amen and blessed be.

Jessica Star Rockers

## Wednesday, March 21

### Letters of consolation

*Abigail Adams to John Adams after the death of her mother, October 9, 1775 (excerpt):*

I have not been composed enough to write to you since last Sabbath when in the bitterness of my soul, I wrote a few confused lines ... The heavy stroke which most of all distresses me is my dear Mother. I cannot overcome my too selfish sorrow, all her tenderness toward me, her care and anxiety for my welfare at all times, her watchfulness over my infant years, her advice and instruction in maturer age; all endear her memory to me, and heighten my sorrow for her loss. At the same time I know a patient submission is my Duty. I will strive to obtain it! But the lenient hand of time alone can blunt the keen Edge of Sorrow. He who deigned to weep over a departed Friend, will surely forgive a sorrow which at all times desires to be bounded and restrained, by a firm Belief that a Being of infinite wisdom and unbounded Goodness, will carve out my portion in tender mercy towards me!

Still I have many blessings left, many comforts to be thankful for, and rejoice in. I am not left to mourn as one without hope.

O how I have longed for your Bosom, to pour forth my sorrows there, and find a healing Balm, but perhaps that has been denied me that I might be led to a higher and more permanent consolater who has bid us call upon him in the day of trouble.

I hope to hear from you soon. Adieu. With hearty wishes for your return I am most Sincerely  
Your Portia.

*John Adams to Abigail Adams, October 13, 1775*

Amidst all your afflictions, I am greatly rejoiced to find that you all along preserve so proper and so happy a Temper – that you are sensible “the Consolations of Religion are the only sure

Comforters.” It is the Constitution under which We are born that if We live long ourselves we must bury our Parents and all our Elder Relations and many of those who are younger. I bewail more than I can express, the Loss of your excellent Mother. I mourn the Loss of so much Purity, and unaffected Piety and Virtue to the World. I knew of no better Character left in it. I grieve for you, and your Brother, and sisters, I grieve for your Father, whose Age, will need the Succour of so excellent a Companion. God almighty grant to you and to every Branch of the Family, all the Support that you want! You and I, my dear, have Reason, if ever Mortals had, to be thoughtful – to look forward beyond the transitory Scene. Whatever is preparing for Us, let us be prepared to receive It is Time for Us to subdue our Passions of every Kind. The Prospect before Us is an Ocean of Uncertainties – in which no pleasing objects appear. We have few Hopes, excepting that of preserving our Honour and our Consciences untainted and a free Constitution to our Country. Let me be sure of these, and amidst all my Weaknesses, I cannot be overcome. With these I can be happy, in extreme Poverty, in humble Insignificance, nay I hope and believe, in Death: without them I should be miserable, with a Crown upon my Head, Millions in my Coffers, and a gaping, idolizing Multitude at my Feet. My heart is too full of Grief for you and our Friends to whom I wish you to present my Regards, to say any Thing of News or Politicks.

## Thursday, March 22

I am slumped in the plastic chair in front of the clothes dryer at my mother’s independent-living facility in Bremerton. Jim, one of the residents, comes in. Heavy with the weight of many years, he is dressed in baggy shorts and a stain-covered shirt. He clatters his stationary walker to the window over the sink and lowers and closes the blinds. He turns and clatters out, then goes and lowers and closes the blinds on the window at the end of the long hall. After that, he does the same to the window in the nearby stairwell.

A little later as I am carrying my mother’s laundry back to her apartment, I see Mrs. Hardy peeking out from behind her door. In her time, she must have been a real Texas beauty. She has the remnants of what must have been a chiseled figure. Her lips are ruby red and she still wears her hair piled sky high.

The coast is clear. Her fists clenched and elbows bent, she heads for the laundry room where I know she’ll hoist the blinds back up with a huff of anger, then do the same to the blinds in the hall and stairwell. I’ve seen it a thousand times.

Lucille lives across the hall from Mrs. Hardy and mom. She’s a reader and waits all month for the bookmobile. Soon she emerges and completes the same circuit, lowering the blinds but twisting the sticks until they let a reasonable amount of light in.

All afternoon, this goes on, day after day. One just a few minutes after the other. First Jim, then Mrs. Hardy, then Lucille. How do they know when to go? And why?

In this pull-back time of Lent, I am reminded that one day I, too, may be dealing with the blinds, my life reduced to a few faint echoes of my past. Isaiah Ch. 40, v. 24 reads, “Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.”

But in Chapter 31, it reads, “Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Dear God,

I need courage to face the future. Amen.

Rachel Pritchett

## Friday, March 23

Dear God:

Wow, what a ride I have had so far! Thank you so much for this life-long opportunity to grow in your Grace. Each day seems almost like a miracle, and I treasure those moments when I can just listen to you, quietly, in my breathing, contented. When we are One.

But it is almost too easy to see you in a sunset, or an infant’s smile, or the burble of a quiet brook, or rising from a meadow on the wings of butterflies. Please help me to see you in the tears of the oppressed, the caskets of the abused, and the self-made dungeons of the addicted. Show me the healing power of your love and forgiveness as it takes on the truly difficult to love and forgive. Bind me up in your robes of persistent ministry so that I can step into the world with confidence and truly make a difference – to accept the momentum you have provided with your gift of Jesus, who has laid down a path to follow and a template with which to gauge the truth. Remember that time when I was too busy to pay you any attention at all? When I was caught up and pressed down and running away? Thank you for waiting, for being patient with me, and for your gentle nudges toward the Light. I have been blessed by those around me that have given me hope and guidance and love – I see you in each of them – and I want to take the baton that they have offered, to join the community of God’s disciples and to reach out with an open heart. Give me the strength to smile, and say “yes, I will follow.”

And please continue to remind me that, while I have just these few cherished moments in this body and in the world, I am truly connected to everything, through you, now and forever.

Until we meet again,

Love,

Jim Macpherson

# Saturday, March 24

Our most heavenly Father,

Thank you for the incredible blessings that you have bestowed on us. A wonderful family, many friends, and a supportive church community to name just a few. On our 39<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we would like to thank you for giving us each other.

Today we ask you to guide us, and the leaders of this world. Help us to be good stewards of this amazing earth and all who live here. Open our hearts to those who are different than we are.

Help us to deal with them with respect and dignity. Give us the courage to stand up against injustice and hate.

For us, there have been many trials in our years together and yet you continue to amaze us with your loving compassion. Your plans for us, our family, and the world exceed anything we could imagine. Through sickness, death and free will gone awry you have guided and supported us. Signs of your loving kindness surround us.

Lord, we pray that you continue to bless us and help us to be a blessing to others. Amen.

Jennie Harris

# Sunday, March 25

## Philippians 2 (Encouragement)

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you –

and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.

Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus – my brother and co-worker and fellow-soldier, your messenger and minister to my need; for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.

## **Monday, March 26**

### **Prompt #6 (Encouragement)**

Write a letter to someone which includes this opening: My blessings for you are ...”

## **Tuesday, March 27**

Dear God,

Thank you for the evening news. The stories of all your saints and sinners. The stoic faces. The crying. The screaming. The pit. The heroes. The survivors. Those who accomplish. Those who languish. The traps. The way forward. The kind. The mean. The disasters. The good fortune. Night after night you show me your big world, show me all your people, show me the never-ending struggle.

God, I don't want the bad things to happen to me. In this overwhelming world, God, give me strength. I need to be strong to walk uphill like so many. I need to be strong so I don't slide down the hill like so many. I need to go the distance. Make me smart. I don't want to fall into the trap. When the hard times come, give me vision so I can see what's coming around the corner. Don't let me fall. Don't let me stumble. Don't let me sin. Save me from the pit. And most important of all, protect my children.

Oh Jesus, Your strength and Your wisdom are infinite. Keep me close so I stay strong. Night after night comes the news. Morning after morning comes the dawn.

Mary Clare Kersten

# Wednesday, March 28

Excerpt from *The Ageless Spirit* by Pete Seeger, shared as a word of ENCOURAGEMENT.

Dear Fellow Humans,\*

In sailing we have a saying: “There are old pilots and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots. So I think one should praise old people because they managed to get old. You don’t manage to get old if you’re too careless or too reckless. And, you know the old joke: growing old is better than the alternative. When I reflect on where I am, I just feel blessed. I have good health and energy and a family that has stuck by me, even when they disagreed with me. I was able to make a living all my life doing something I loved.

(One) advantage (to growing old) is that you gain a bit of insight, a little more wisdom. I do know that I am a little more suspicious than ever, about words. We used to have a little sign hung up here where we’re talking and it said, “In trying to persuade others, setting a good example is not the best thing; it is the only thing. – Albert Schweitzer” I still talk too much and don’t act enough. Somebody said, “Words lie halfway between thought and action, and too often substitute for both.”

I’ve gradually come to the opinion that everything’s connected more closely than I realized. My guess is we won’t solve the problem of racism and sexism and a whole lot of other things until each of us, individually, realizes how much we depend on others – sometimes those near and dear to us, sometimes those faraway and unknown. It gets you to thinking about eternity, about the spiritual, about the ways we are connected to one another.

These days, I look upon God as everything. The late great mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said that religion is the ideal of education throughout the ages because it inculcates duty and reverence. I think that’s a good definition of religion – duty and reverence. He says, “Duty arises from our potential control over the course of events, and reverence arises from the perception that the present includes the complete sum of existence, that great amplitude of time, forward and backward, which is eternity.” If that can’t make you reverent, I don’t know what would. We live in a web of interconnections. If I slap my hands together and I disturb some atoms, they’re going to disturb other atoms and they’re going to push others and, in effect, have influence for all eternity to come. That can make you reverent. Growing up is about becoming responsible, about lending ourselves and our talents and our energies to the great chain that connects us all.

This is, of course, the world’s best advice to any old person: You don’t give up simply because you’re not as good at it as you might have been; you still have fun with it. And this goes for almost anything.

My father told me there is a graveyard in Tombstone, Arizona, with a little wooden cross over some cowboy’s grave and somebody had scrawled on it, “He done his damndest.” And really, that’s all we can do in this world: We do our best wherever we are to be a strong link in the

chain. If we can be a strong link, we should know how lucky we are, even though the links to come never knew our name, don't know where or when we lived. But in the future, assuming there is a future, they'll know that they would not be here if it hadn't been for a lot of links that came before.

Sincerely, Pete Seeger\*

\* *Salutation and closing borrowed from another Seeger communique*

## Maundy Thursday, March 29

Dear God,

Thanks for being a loving Father, faithful Son, and helpful Holy Spirit...three in one. Thanks for the washing of feet, the blessing of bread and wine.

Help those who are struggling with health issues. Be with them and their families as they walk this highway. Help our country that it may learn to compromise, to work together for the whole good, not individual. Help our families near and far to feel your love.

Wow, you washed the feet (smelly and dusty) of your disciples. Wow, you gave us the bread and wine as tangible gifts by which to remember you. Wow, has anyone told you that you are special? You are!

Shalom,

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Prayer: O Savior, cast me not away from your presence. Let not my sins remain with me because of impenitence of heart or because I doubt your word and promises. Let me become one with you and all your saints as I receive with them this blessed sacrament. Make me yours, and give me strength to amend my sinful life and walk closer to you. Amen.

Gail Christensen

## Good Friday, March 30

“Exalt the Cross! God has hung the destiny of the race upon it. Other things we may do in the realm of ethics, and on the lines of philanthropic reforms; but our main duty converges into setting that one glorious beacon of salvation, Calvary's Cross, before the gaze of every immortal soul.”

Presbyterian theologian Theodore Ledyard Cuyler

# Saturday, March 31

Dear Lord,

Every time I take communion I ask the same thing – to forgive my sins and graciously help my infirmities. I am not too specific since I am discovering new infirmities on a regular basis these days. It would seem too insignificant to ask for help opening products with seals on them. But clear eyesight is another thing – a crucial part of every waking moment. Please clear the vision in my left eye.

You gave us eyes as our jewels to enjoy and navigate our world. I know you would not want me to struggle with words and music on a page.

I praise and thank you for eye doctors who work miracles with new equipment and technology to design a new lense for my eye that is not cloudy. What a joy to feel heard and helped with access to good care.

Colors are brighter, print is clear. An infirmity graciously healed.

Thanks be to God.

Sincerely,

Benay Nordby

Psalm 138:3 “When I asked for your help, you answered my prayer and gave me courage.”