

⊕ LIVING COMPASS

Living Well Through Lent 2024



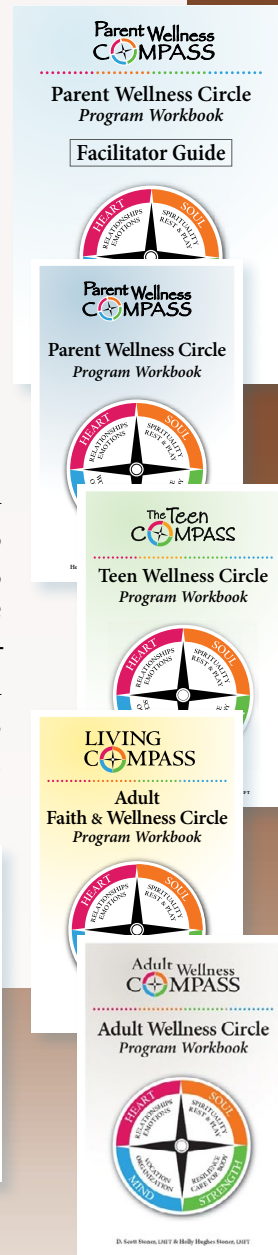
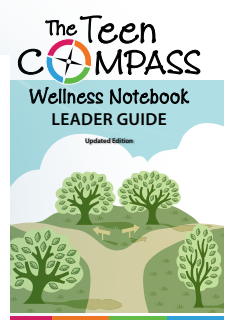
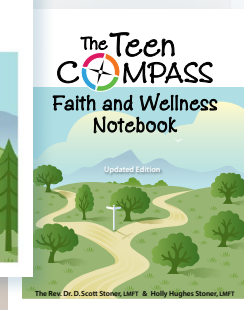
*Practicing Forgiveness with All Your
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

A Living Compass Seasonal Resource

The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative

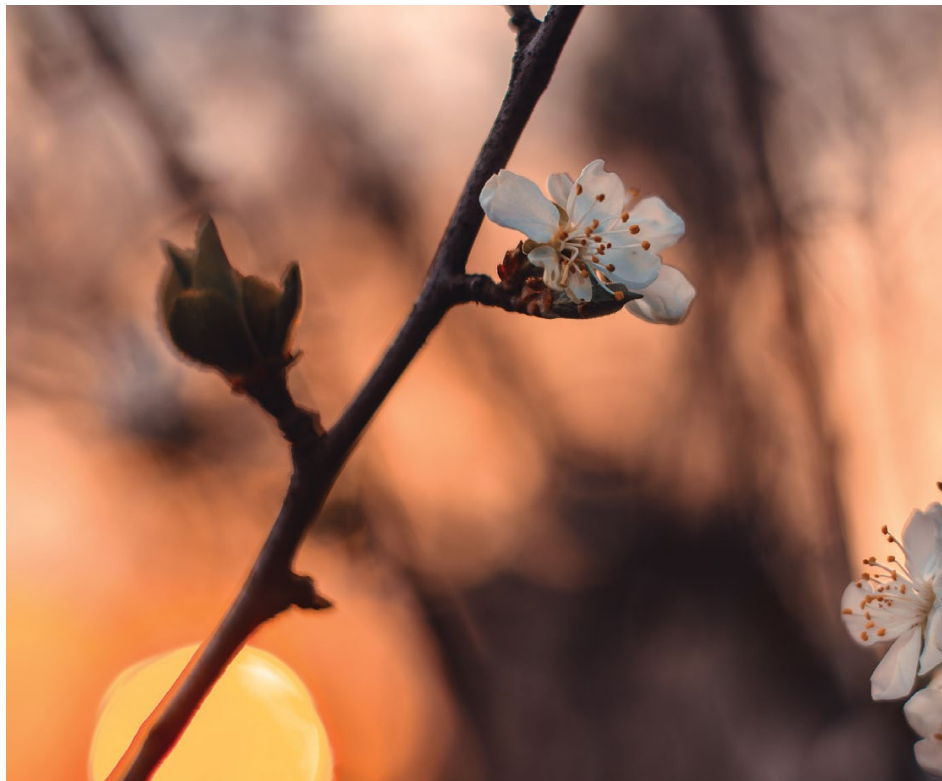
In addition to our Advent and Lent devotionals (in English and Spanish), Living Compass offers a number of resources (faith-based and secular) and trainings designed to outfit individuals, families, congregations, and organizations for the journey toward wellness and wholeness. Recognizing that we have a variety of resources that can be used in many creative ways, we offer several ways to learn about, experience, and to become more familiar with them.

We invite you to visit our website: livingcompass.org. There you will find more detailed information about our resources, including books, workbooks, facilitator guides for many of our programs, Wellness Circles, Community Wellness Advocate Certificate Trainings, as well as individual training and consultation options. You can also sign up for the Living Compass newsletter, which is the best way to learn about upcoming trainings, highlighted resources, and other opportunities.



To learn more about our resources and our Community Wellness Advocate training, please contact our Program Director Carolyn Karl at Carolyn@livingcompass.org.

Living Well Through Lent 2024



*Practicing Forgiveness with All Your
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

*The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative
was created with a generous gift from Ab and Nancy
Nicholas. While Ab passed away in 2016, their
generous support continues to inspire us and make
this resource possible.*

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- This devotional is available as:
 - an ebook at amazon.com
 - a free downloadable PDF on our website: livingcompass.org/Lent
- We also have a free downloadable Facilitator Guide on our website.
- Find us on the web: livingcompass.org
- Questions? Email us: info@livingcompass.org



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About the Writers

Robbin Brent is the director of publications and resource development for Living Compass, a spiritual director, founder of Wisdom Way of Knowing, and the former director of the Center for Spiritual Resources in NC. An experienced leader of spiritual retreats and programs, she facilitates gatherings of contemplative leaders, and is a graduate of Shalem Institute's *Transforming Community* and *Spiritual Guidance* programs. She loves spending time with her two sons, their partners, and four grandchildren. She also enjoys hiking, reading, and watching sunrises and the wondrous array of wildlife that graces her backyard.

The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde serves as spiritual leader for the Episcopal Diocese of Washington. A passionate believer in the gospel of Jesus, Bishop Budde is committed to the spiritual and numerical growth of Episcopal congregations. She is the author of three books: *How to be Brave: Decisive Moments in Life and Faith* (2023), *Receiving Jesus: The Way of Love* (2020), and *Gathering Up the Fragments: Preaching as Spiritual Practice* (2007). When not working, you'll often find her riding her bicycle, cooking dinner for friends, or visiting family.

Victoria L. Garvey's first aspiration, at age three, was to be a gas station attendant. She became a teacher instead. From Vicki: "I've delighted in helping others delight in lifelong learning. From second graders to graduate students, from the sometimes less-than-enthusiastic high school crowd to eager seminarians with visions of collars in their heads, I've taught and learned from them all." Now "retired" on paper anyway, Vicki continues to teach via Zoom and to write occasionally. And she continues to delight in travels and adventures with her wife and their furry roommate.



The Rev. Andy Jones serves as the tenth rector of Saint Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Madison, Wisconsin. He has worked as a professional musician, as a guitar and violin repairman, and as a sign language interpreter. He was a stay-at-home dad for seven years before entering Virginia Theological Seminary where he graduated with honors in 2002. Before coming to Madison, he served at All Saints Episcopal Church in Frederick, Maryland. He and his wife Suzanne have been married for 40 years and have two adult children. He enjoys playing the guitar, fly fishing, and having walked the Camino Ingles this past spring, really enjoys long walks and hiking.

The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski, LMFT, is a licensed marriage and family therapist in private practice, and an infant and early childhood mental health consultant in Wisconsin. Jan and Dennis have been married for 45 years. Between the families of their four adult sons, they are blessed with nine grandchildren who are the absolute joys of their lives. Adventures with her nine grandchildren; leading, rebuilding, and dancing with the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies; training her little tripod Poodle/Bichon, Gracie, to become a therapy dog; knitting; and sipping oat milk lattes with friends are sources of life and joy for Jan.



Westina Matthews, PhD, is an author, public speaker, spiritual director, and retreat leader who has found a way to connect with others through her books, essays, lectures, and teaching. For twelve years, she was an adjunct professor at The General Theological Seminary in the Center for Christian Spirituality where she taught contemplative spiritual direction. She is a mentor for both the Trinity Leadership Fellows Program and for Episcopal leaders from over 25 dioceses around the country and throughout the Anglican Communion for the inaugural year-long program *The Leader's Way* at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale; and serves on the boards of the Gathering of Leaders (a networking organization for Episcopal clergy) and Spiritual Directors International. Her most recent books are *Soul Food: Nourishing Essays on Contemplative Living and Leadership*, *This Band of Sisterhood*, and *Dancing from the Inside Out*.

The Rev. Anna C. Noon walked 800 km of the Camino Frances from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Santiago de Compostela in the fall of 2021. During her walk, Noon discerned a call to minister to pilgrims on the Camino. Taking a leap of faith, she moved to Santiago de Compostela and began her ministry as Pilgrim Missioner for the Anglican Pilgrim Centre in Santiago on Easter Day 2022. Noon works directly with Bishop Carlos López Lozano to develop the Anglican pilgrim support network throughout Spain and Portugal. Prior to embarking on this new journey, she served parishes in the Dioceses of Southern Virginia, Maryland, and New Jersey. Noon loves being a lifelong learner and a citizen of God's beautiful world, so adventures in good eating, pilgrim traveling, beach combing, community gardening, symphony going, choral singing, and idea trading with fellow humans bring her much joy. Mitties, her beloved calico kitty, especially delights in time devoted to curling up with a good book, ever hopeful for a warm lap and chin scratches.



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

The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner—founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative—has served his community for 40 years as an Episcopal priest, retreat leader, licensed marriage and family therapist, and author. In addition to his coaching and psychotherapy work, he leads wellness retreats for organizations and leadership teams. He is also host of the newly launched *Living Compass Podcast*. Scott has been married to Holly Hughes Stoner for 45 years and together they are the co-creators of *The Teen Compass* and *The Parent Wellness Compass*, and are co-hosts of the *Wellness Compass Podcast*. In his free time, Scott loves cycling, running, soccer, and spending time with family, especially with his two grandsons.

The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

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

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

The Living Compass Model for Well-Being offers us guidance in four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. Just like a mobile or kinesthetic art, these dimensions are interconnected—movement in one area affects all the others. We are not compartmentalized people. Whatever impacts one area of our lives (positively or negatively) has an impact on the other areas. Each of the four quadrants focuses on two areas of well-being, and each of the eight areas helps to guide and equip us as we commit to being more intentional about the way we live our lives. The purpose of this Compass is to provide a dynamic resource that will assist us in our search for balance and wellness. Our call is to live an undivided life, where heart, soul, strength, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*.

Areas of Wellness

Heart

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

Soul

- **Spirituality.** The ability to connect with a higher purpose in life and to have a clear set of beliefs, morals, and values that guides our actions.
- **Rest and Play.** The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.



Strength

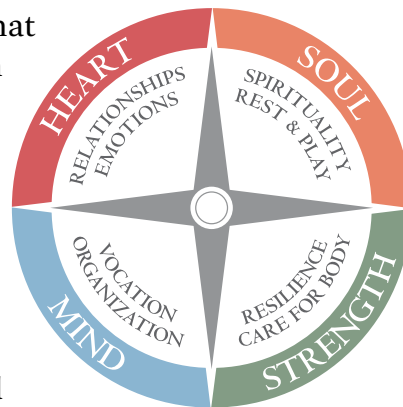
- **Care for the Body.** The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.
- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.



Mind

- **Organization.** The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.
- **Vocation.** The ability to align our life’s purpose with the gifts and talents we’ve been given. This includes work, volunteer service, and any educational/enrichment pursuits.

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



The Living Compass

Introduction

Lent is a time for introspection and self-reflection, a time to reflect on the core of what it means to live a Christian life in the midst of great change and uncertainty. When facing change and uncertainty, practicing forgiveness becomes more central to that life so that we are freer to both receive and share the healing love of God.

We are delighted that you have chosen to use our 2024 Lenten devotional to assist you on your own journey. And we are honored to have nine guest writers to help us reflect on this year's theme of *Practicing Forgiveness with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*. Their diverse and rich voices encourage us to understand that in order to prepare for the new life of Easter, we need to be intentional about discerning what it truly means to practice forgiveness with our whole being.

As important as are the daily readings in this devotional, even more significant will be the reflections and insights that emerge in response to the readings. We encourage you to record them, either in the spaces provided, or in a separate journal. To help you to more deeply connect with what holds value and meaning at this time in your life, we have included spiritual practices on pp. 84–87 that you can engage with if that appeals to you. When possible, join or start a group (both in person and virtual work well for this) where you can discuss your thoughts with others. Our Facilitator Guide provides additional guidance on how to use this devotional when hosting small-group reflection and conversation.

Additionally, we are offering an opportunity to have the reflections from this devotional emailed to you each day during Lent. You can sign up for these free daily emails on our website: LivingCompass.org/Lent.



And as noted on the inside back cover, the *Living Compass Podcast* will release episodes related to practicing forgiveness during the season of Lent. You can listen on our LivingCompass.org website or in your favorite podcast app.

It is an honor to walk with you on the journey through Lent toward Easter.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner
Director, Living Compass Spirituality & Well-
ness Ministry Initiative

Living Compass—working with The Rev. Pedro Lopez and Estella Lopez from the Episcopal Diocese of Texas—has also published, *Vivir una buena Cuaresma en el 2024: Practicando el perdón con todo el corazón, alma, fuerzas y mente*—a Spanish Lenten daily devotional with completely original content. Questions? Contact us: info@livingcompass.org. To learn more or to order, visit livingcompass.org/lent.



The Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Lent 2024

Lent Year B	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
Ash Wednesday February 14, 2024	Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12	Psalm 51:1-17	2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10	Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21
First Sunday in Lent February 18, 2024	Genesis 9:8-17	Psalm 25:1-10	1 Peter 3:18-22	Mark 1:9-15
Second Sunday in Lent February 25, 2024	Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16	Psalm 22:23-31	Romans 4:13-25	Mark 8:31-38 or Mark 9:2-9
Third Sunday in Lent March 3, 2024	Exodus 20:1-17	Psalm 19	1 Corinthians 1:18-25	John 2:13-22
Fourth Sunday in Lent March 10, 2024	Numbers 21:4-9	Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22	Ephesians 2:1-10	John 3:14-21
Fifth Sunday in Lent March 17, 2024	Jeremiah 31:31-34	Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16	Hebrews 5:5-10	John 12:20-33
Liturgy of the Palms March 24, 2024 Sixth Sunday in Lent		Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29		Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16

Holy Week Year B	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
Monday of Holy Week March 25, 2024	Isaiah 42:1-9	Psalm 36:5-11	Hebrews 9:11-15	John 12:1-11
Tuesday of Holy Week March 26, 2024	Isaiah 49:1-7	Psalm 71:1-14	1 Corinthians 1:18-31	John 12:20-36
Wednesday of Holy Week March 27, 2024	Isaiah 50:4-9a	Psalm 70	Hebrews 12:1-3	John 13:21-32
Maundy Thursday March 28, 2024 Holy Thursday	Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14	Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19	1 Corinthians 11:23-26	John 13:1-17, 31b-35
Good Friday March 29, 2024	Isaiah 52:13-53:12	Psalm 22	Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9	John 18:1-19:42
Holy Saturday March 30, 2024	Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24	Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16	1 Peter 4:1-8	Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42
Resurrection of the Lord March 31, 2024 Easter Day	*Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 25:6-9	Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24	1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43	John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8

Ways to Use
Living Well Through Lent 2024
A Personal Devotional and a Lenten Program

This devotional is intended to be used for daily personal reflection as we journey through Lent. We begin each Sunday with a reflection written by one of our guest writers. Every other day of the week begins with Scripture or a quote, followed by a reflection, and then “Making it Personal” questions, which offer an opportunity for you to reflect on the readings as they relate to your own life and spiritual journey. You might want to write down important thoughts, feelings, or insights, so we encourage you to purchase a journal to use as a companion to this devotional.

This resource can also be used as the basis for a church Lenten program, and we have created a free downloadable Facilitator Guide for group use, available on our website: LivingCompass.org/Lent.

This devotional is perfect as a resource for a half- or full-day Lenten retreat (more on this in the Lent Facilitator Guide). Giving each person a copy of this devotional (either printed or as a PDF, available for free on our website) would ensure that the experience of the retreat would stay with them throughout the remainder of Lent.

We are excited to offer the daily reflection by email too. You can sign up for these emails on our website: LivingCompass.org/Lent.

This Lenten season, however you use this devotional, our hope and prayer is that you feel supported in your desire to practice your faith in a way that is deeply renewing.

Ash Wednesday

February 14, 2024

The “Why” of Love and Forgiveness

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

—Ash Wednesday Day Service, Book of Common Prayer

This year we have an unusual convergence of Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day, both occurring on the same day. While these two days stand for something quite different, there is a teaching story that provides wisdom on how to approach both.

Imagine a person buying a beautiful bouquet of flowers for someone they love for Valentine’s Day. When the beloved person receives the flowers, they are touched and extremely grateful. Now imagine the person, after giving the flowers, carelessly adds, “Well, it is Valentine’s Day, and this is what a person is supposed to do, right? Plus, I didn’t want you to be mad at me if I didn’t do something for you today.” Then they walk away.

Ouch! The flowers, in and of themselves, would have been a wonderful gift. But when the person says, “This is what a person is supposed to do, and I just didn’t want you to be mad at me,” all of the positive energy of the gift of the flowers disappears. Why? Because the giver of the flowers revealed that their giving was motivated not by love, but by obligation and even fear. Giving someone a gift because you feel obligated or afraid is very different than offering that same gift to express genuine love and delight. This is where Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day have something in common.

Our intentions regarding how we approach these special days make all the difference. We have often heard people come to the season of Lent with an attitude of, “I feel like I have to do something to be a good Christian, and I certainly don’t want God to be disappointed in me.” In matters of love, as in celebrating Valentine’s Day and Lent, the “why” we do something is as important as the “what” we do.

ASH WEDNESDAY

We invite all of us to approach Lent this year, not from a place of guilt or obligation, but from a place of love and as a wonderful opportunity for spiritual growth.

Concerning our specific focus for this year's devotional, the invitation to us all is to approach the practice of forgiveness from a similar desire—not as something we ought to do, but as something we want to do. Practicing forgiveness will help us grow our spiritual life and deepen our relationships with God and others.

For those who attend Ash Wednesday services today, when the sign of the cross is marked on your forehead with ashes, these words will be said: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

These words are not intended to make us feel bad, but to remind us of the truth of our mortality. There is great wisdom in remembering these words as we begin our focus on practicing forgiveness because they humbly remind us that our time on this earth is limited. So there is no time like the present to deepen our practice of forgiveness for others and ourselves.

As we begin our journey through Lent and focus on practicing forgiveness, we pray that we all approach this journey with humble hearts, minds, and souls, open to learning what God has to teach us.

Making it Personal: What thoughts and intentions are you aware of as we begin this season of Lent? What hopes do you have regarding our theme of practicing forgiveness? What is your response to the words, “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return”?



Thursday, February 15, 2024

Deciding to Forgive

Forgiveness is freedom. Forgiveness is liberation. Forgiveness is a choice.

—Ernest Agyemang Yeboah

In week three of this devotional, we will more deeply explore forgiveness as a decision, a choice. Today, as we begin our focus on practicing forgiveness, we want to introduce this idea so that we can begin thinking about the decisions or choices we want to make this Lent.

In reflecting on love, psychologist Eric Fromm wrote, “love is a decision.” We think he meant that actual love is more than simply a feeling. Because feelings ebb and flow, he found it more helpful to focus on the idea that love is also a decision, an act of the will, something strong and true, rather than fleeting and changeable.

Forgiveness is also a decision that we can choose to make. We can choose to forgive for many different reasons, as we will soon discover. Yet, regardless of the reason, we don’t have to wait until the hurt has subsided, or until we have a strong desire to forgive. We can choose to forgive even when we still feel vulnerable. Or we can choose to forgive when we decide that the weight of holding on to the pain is no longer in our own best interest.

Perhaps you can think of a time when you made a decision to forgive someone. Or maybe you can think of a time when you benefited from the gift of someone who has decided to forgive you. As we continue our journey through Lent, we will all be invited to reflect on any decisions we wish to make regarding forgiveness at this point in our lives.

Making it Personal: What do you think of the idea that forgiveness is a decision? What has helped you decide to forgive in the past? Can you think of a current situation or person that you would like to consider making the decision to forgive?

Friday, February 16, 2024

A Season for Growth and Renewal

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Give me the joy of your saving help again.

—Psalm 51:11,13

Over time, the season of Lent has evolved to signify different things for different people. For many it has become a welcome season that provides time set apart to go deeper in their faith journey. For others, the season of Lent has come to represent a negative time because of the connection to guilt it has for them.

Some observe Lent by giving up something for the duration of the season, while others like to take something on. And others practice some combination of both. With this in mind, each Wednesday we will offer an invitation to try a spiritual practice related to the theme of forgiveness. Along with additional practices you can find in the back of this devotional, these reflections will include ideas and suggestions for things you might want to take on as part of your Lenten journey.

The writers of this devotional approach Lent as a season for growth and renewal. This mindset is also described in the words of Psalm 51, which are found in the Ash Wednesday readings in many churches: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew [put a new and right] a right spirit within me. Give me the joy of your saving help again.”

Whether we are giving something up, or taking something on, Lent is an opportunity for us to open our hearts to God and experience the renewal of our spirits.

Making it Personal: When observing the season of Lent, has your experience been more positive, negative, or neutral? Are you drawn more to the idea of giving something up or taking something on for Lent—or both? If you desire an experience of a renewed spirit this Lent, what do you hope that looks like for you?



Saturday, February 17, 2024

Listening to the Whispers

Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.

—Frederick Buechner

Our lives are always speaking to us; the question is, are we listening? Each Saturday this Lent, we will take a few moments to “listen to the whispers,” pausing to pay attention to what we have experienced and learned during the week. This first week is a short week because we began with Ash Wednesday, but it is helpful for us to get in the habit of using the space we’ll provide each Saturday for noticing what whispers you have sensed this week related to forgiveness.

God often speaks to us more in a whisper than a shout. The whisper might come during a time of quiet reflection or prayer. It might come during a conversation with another person. It could also come from something our bodies are saying to us. A whisper is like a warning light on a car’s dashboard. It may not require immediate attention, but ignoring it will likely create more difficulty.

We are more likely to ignore God’s whispers if what we are sensing makes us uncomfortable. This can certainly happen as we explore the theme of practicing forgiveness. Painful feelings may arise, and our first instinct may be to ignore them. Remembering that the process of change and growth is almost always uncomfortable (initially) can help us stay present to the whispers and invitations for growth that the Spirit is offering us.

Making it Personal: Looking back on the readings for these first few days of Lent and your own notes, what thoughts were most important for you? Are you aware of any discomfort as you begin to focus on practicing forgiveness? If so, can you sit and perhaps learn from that discomfort as you listen to what God might be saying to you?

The First Sunday in Lent

February 18, 2024

Practice the Forgiveness You Need

Mariann Budde

*Show me your ways, O Lord, and teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation.*

—Psalm 25:3-4, Book of Common Prayer

A dentist has a sign on his office wall that reads: *Floss only the teeth you want to keep.* It occurs to me that an equivalent sign for our churches might be: *Practice only the forgiveness you need.*

As we begin the season that invites us into the heart of Jesus, forgiveness awaits us there as his gift and call to us. “Forgive us our sins,” he taught us to pray, “as we forgive those who sin against us.” A disciple once asked Jesus how many times he ought to forgive. Keeping score, Jesus told him, misses the point.

I was once on an airplane stuck on the tarmac for five hours. The woman to my right complained endlessly. Across the aisle a good-natured man engaged in pleasant conversation with those around him. They were both *practiced* in distinct ways of living—one striving to see the good in all things; the other in looking for, and generally finding, the worst. The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh describes this as cultivating seeds within us.

“Love one another as I have loved you,” Jesus urged his disciples the night before he died. He could have as easily said, “Forgive one another as I have forgiven you.” It is one of the hardest things Jesus asks of us, and the most important, for it is God’s way with us all.

Forgiveness for the deeper wounds doesn’t come easily. It takes time, courage, and sufficient internal healing to rebalance the scales of power. We often overlook the power dynamic involved in forgiveness, and how we must rebuild a foundation of inner strength in order to forgive.



Monday, February 19, 2024

Grounding Forgiveness in Our Faith

For Christians, forgiveness is not an option. Yet our capacity to practice forgiveness depends on our willingness to receive it ourselves.

—Mariann Budde

Each Monday we will introduce a theme that will be our focus for the week. This week we will be focusing on grounding our practice of forgiveness in our faith.

In yesterday's reflections, Mariann Budde wrote about forgiveness: "It is one of the hardest things Jesus asks of us, and the most important, for it is God's way with us all." As Christians, we will find that when we ground our approach to forgiveness in the teachings of our faith, we are able to live more fully into who Jesus invites us to be.

For example, when Peter asks Jesus, "How often should I forgive? As many as seven times?," Jesus responds, "Not seven times, but seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22).

Our smaller selves tend to keep score, not just of the slights we receive, but also how much we do the right thing. Jesus invites Peter, and all of us, to live out of deeper, spiritual selves where we don't keep score of either our hurts or the opportunities we have to practice forgiveness.

Our lives are defined by both our beliefs and our actions. This week we'll look at how we can more deeply ground our actions of forgiveness in the beliefs and teachings of our faith.

Making it Personal: What do you think of Mariann Budde's words that "For Christians, forgiveness is not an option"? What Biblical stories or teachings come to mind for you when you think about forgiveness?

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

The Parable of the Forgiving Father

Get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!

—Luke 15:23-24

One of the most dramatic and memorable stories on forgiveness in the New Testament is the story known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). We included “Father” in the title of today’s reflection because we believe that it is his radical expression of forgiveness that is the heart of the story.

The entire text of the parable can be found in the back of this devotional on page 76. Each of the three lead characters of the story illustrates essential truths about forgiveness.

The younger brother, the prodigal, reminds us that when it comes to seeking forgiveness for ourselves, we have to be willing to overcome our pride and any desire we have to hide our vulnerability. The older brother reminds us that the natural human reaction to wrong-doing is often judgment and self-righteousness. It is this part of our ego that we often have to overcome in order to practice forgiveness.

The third person in the story, the forgiving father, embodies the kind of radical love and forgiveness that Jesus calls us to in our own lives. Jesus includes both the older brother’s and the father’s reactions because he knows all too well that each of us contains these two opposing natures within us. Sometimes we need to accept and confess our “older-brother nature” as the first step in letting it go in order to become more like the forgiving father.

Making it Personal: Do you recognize yourself in the older brother’s reaction to his prodigal sibling? If so, what helps you to extend compassion to that part of yourself so that you are able to respond more like the forgiving father?



Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Contemplative Practice: Gratitude

For all Jesus' teachings on forgiveness, he only has one thing to say about how to go about it: it begins in gratitude for the forgiveness God offers us each day.

—Mariann Budde

Today, and for the next four Wednesdays in Lent, we invite you to explore one of the contemplative practices we have included in the back of this devotional on pp. 84-87. Our hope is that one or more of these practices will deepen and enrich your spiritual journey, through Lent and beyond. The opening quote from last Sunday's reflection from Mariann offers a beautiful bridge between grounding forgiveness in our faith and a daily practice Jesus invites us to: A practice of gratitude.

In addition to Mariann's wisdom, there are many Bible passages that counsel us to be grateful. One that we often return to is: *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* (1 Thess. 5:16-18). Note that this passage encourages us to be grateful *in* all things, not necessarily *for* all things. A daily practice of gratitude can help to create a safe space in which to notice both what keeps us in the flow of God's love, and what obstructs our awareness of God's unceasing love and mercy.

A regular gratitude practice can offer us room to discover and name what touches our hearts and the hearts of others. And with a grateful heart, we are better able to see all the ways our longings and prayers join with God's longings and prayers for us.

Making it Personal: As often as is possible, write down three things for which you are grateful. Then, take a few moments to notice the ways, large and small, that being thankful has made a difference in your life and in your journey of faith. How might this practice deepen your experience of practicing forgiveness this Lent?

Thursday, February 22, 2024

Forgiveness in Action

*My humanity is bound up in yours, for
we can only be human together.*

—Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*

When grounding forgiveness in our faith, it is helpful not only to study the teachings of our faith, but also to be inspired by people who have put those teachings into practice. St. Francis is one example of a person who inspired others through his actions.

Desmond Tutu is another example, a modern saint who preached the good news of forgiveness by the way he lived his life. Even after death, he continues to teach us the true power of forgiveness through the way he facilitated the healing of South Africa in the wake of the devastating effects of apartheid.

He, along with his daughter Mpho Tutu, wrote about the healing power of forgiveness in their book, *The Book of Forgiving: The Four-fold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World*. Here is an excerpt from p. 7:

In South Africa, we chose to seek forgiveness rather than revenge. That choice averted a bloodbath. For every injustice, there is a choice. As we have said, you can choose forgiveness or revenge, but revenge is always costly. Choosing forgiveness rather than retaliation ultimately serves to make you a stronger and freer person. Peace always comes to those who choose to forgive. While both Mpho and I have seen the effects of drinking the bitter poison of anger and resentment—seen how it corrodes and destroys from the inside out—we have also seen the sweet balm of forgiveness soothe and transform even the most virulent situations. This is why we can say there is hope.

Making it Personal: Reread the excerpt and then pause to notice what speaks to you. Is there a person in your life who has inspired you by how they have practiced forgiveness? If so, what have you learned from them that you can practice in your life?



Friday, February 23, 2024

The Fruit of Forgiveness

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

—Galatians 5:22

The passage from Galatians lists nine attributes as being the fruit of the Spirit. While forgiveness is not listed, we clearly believe it to be a fruit of the Spirit.

Or perhaps another way to say it is that when we practice love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, we then will be able to more easily practice forgiveness. Let's look at a few reasons why.

Love, kindness, generosity, and gentleness are all part of what is offered when we forgive. Peace is more possible after forgiveness. Faithfulness, patience, and self-control are often needed in order to practice forgiveness. And joy is what we experience when we are able to freely love and forgive, as we beheld in the father's response in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

Another important reason we think of forgiveness as a fruit of the Spirit is that it is a helpful metaphor to remind us that our capacity to bear the fruit of forgiveness is directly related to the depth of our spiritual roots. When we actively nurture our faith, we will bear more spiritual fruit, including the fruit of forgiveness—both for ourselves, and for others.

Making it Personal: What connection do you see between the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians and forgiveness? What connection do you see between the state of your spiritual life and your capacity to offer forgiveness—both to yourself and to others?

Saturday, February 24, 2024

Listening to the Whispers

I found I had less and less to say, until finally, I became silent, and began to listen. I discovered in the silence the voice of God.

—Soren Kierkegaard

This week we focused on the connection between our faith and our practice of forgiveness. Mariann Budde's quote from her reflection for last Sunday sums up what we have considered this week. "For all Jesus' teachings on forgiveness, he only has one thing to say about how to go about it: it begins in gratitude for the forgiveness God offers us each day."

We also learned what Scripture teaches about forgiveness, reflecting on the Parable of the Forgiving Father (also known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son), and the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians. We were reminded of the value of a spiritual practice of gratitude. Finally, we were inspired by how Desmond and Mpho Tutu came to practice forgiveness as part of the healing of South Africa after apartheid ended.

As we will do each Saturday, we close our week by pausing to listen to the whispers of what God has revealed to us during the week. While the quotes and writings offered in this devotional are important, even more important is our willingness to pay attention to the whispers from God we are hearing as we engage with the material. May these help us to continue to focus more deeply on our own journey of forgiveness.

Making it Personal: Looking back on the readings for this first full week of Lent, as well as your own notes, was there a nudge or whisper from the Spirit for you? If so, is what you are sensing a source of comfort or is a source of challenge, or both? Is there something you have done, or some action that you want to take, as a result of what you are learning?

The Second Sunday in Lent

February 25, 2024

An Ever-Flowing River of Grace

Lisa Senuta

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

—Mark 8:35

I am writing this in the Rocky Mountains where the rivers are full and flowing powerfully down the mountains, pooling into lakes and ponds before rushing on down into valleys. They are an icon of the interior life. Jesus seemed to understand that forgiveness is a constant invitation to join an ever-flowing river of mercy and grace.

When I was young, I was taught that forgiveness was needed whenever I misbehaved, crossed a line, broke a rule or divine code. To my immature mind, it seemed like forgiveness was more of a transaction. Now I understand that forgiveness is a perpetual invitation to trust the sufficient provision for our bodies and souls in God's abiding love for all creation. An invitation to spiritually come alive. Yet, a perpetual invitation that we refuse again and again.

These few lines from David Whyte wake me up to a larger sense of what forgiveness is every time I encounter them.

*Enough. These few words are enough, if not these words,
this breath. If not this breath, this sitting here. This
opening to the life we have refused again and again until
now, until now.*

Even though it is what we most deeply long for, our endless need for forgiveness is our perpetual refusal to enter into the eternal flow of the river of God's grace and mercy.

I recently saw this longing on display in a live recording of Leonard Cohen singing *Anthem*. In the video you can sense the whole crowd's



Monday, February 26, 2024

Forgiveness and Letting Go

Maybe losing our life is letting go of the life we think we should or ought to have and accept life as it is right here, as it is right now.

—Lisa Senuta

In an earlier reflection (Friday, February 16), we wrote that observing Lent often involves both giving something up and taking something on. As we continue our focus on taking on and expanding the practice of forgiveness in our lives, we soon learn that this also requires us to give up some of the things that might be blocking our capacity to forgive.

This week our theme is “Forgiveness and Letting Go.” We will focus on what we may need to let go of in order to more fully join in what Lisa Senuta described yesterday as Jesus’ “constant invitation to join an ever-flowing river of mercy and grace.”

Together we will explore over the next week that in order to practice forgiveness we will have to let go of control, resentment, perfectionism, and self-righteousness, to name a few of the barriers to practicing forgiveness.

Change is always hard because it always involves letting go. There is an old joke about a person saying “I really want to grow but I don’t really want to change.” Growth is always a dance of both taking on and letting go.

Perhaps this is what Jesus means by “If you lose your life, you will find it.”

Making it Personal: What is your initial thought about the connection between forgiveness and letting go? As we begin our focus on this theme, do you already have an idea of what God might be calling you to let go of? If so, naming that now and asking for God’s help with letting go may be helpful.

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

When to Let Go of Anger and Resentment

*Holding on to anger and resentment is like drinking
poison and expecting the other person to die.*

—original source unknown

Feelings of anger and resentment are appropriate responses to being hurt, especially by someone we thought we could trust. When our hurt is fresh, these feelings need to be fully experienced and expressed. Doing so is an essential part of healing.

On the other hand, holding on to anger and resentment for too long can impair our healing. The question is: what constitutes “too long?” A month, a year, ten years, a lifetime? Each of us has to discern the answer for ourselves. When we are unsure, seeking the wise counsel of a clergy person, therapist, or friend is always helpful.

Our experience is that we usually know when we are hurting ourselves by not being willing to let go of a past hurt. Please notice, we said a “past hurt” because underlying almost all anger is hurt, and so part of our healing and letting go is acknowledging the hurt we have experienced.

We are learning that forgiveness is a choice that we can make without having to involve the person who has hurt us. Knowing when it is time to make the choice to let go of anger and resentment and move toward forgiveness is a crucial step in enhancing our own emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being.

Making it Personal: Can you think of a time when you benefited from letting go of anger? Are aware of any anger or resentment that you sense you might be holding on to right now? If you need to reach out to someone to help you with your anger, do you know to whom you would turn?



Wednesday, February 28, 2024

Contemplative Practice: Receive & Release

To stand at the edge of the sea, to sense the ebb and flow of the tides, is to have knowledge of things that are as nearly eternal as any earthly life can be.

—Rachel Carson

Those who enjoy spending time by the ocean have experienced the eternal rhythm of the waves washing up on the sand or rocks, retreating, then returning. This ebb and flow, of being received and then released, is closely related both to the theme this week of forgiveness and letting go, and to the contemplative practice we invite you to try this week: *Receive and Release*.*

Related to this practice is a short exercise that can remind us how it feels to hold on to unforgiveness, and how it feels to allow ourselves to choose to let go of wounds, recent and old. Make a fist, with either or both hands, and clench them as hard as you can for fifteen seconds. Then, gradually open your hands and release your clenched fists. What differences do you notice in your body and the overall way you feel between these two gestures? We find that opening the hands not only releases tension, it allows us to be more relaxed and receptive, which opens our hearts and minds to the blessings we receive when we choose to surrender rather than to continue to cling. We simply cannot be open to others, or to God, with a clenched fist.

As we continue to practice, it becomes easier to let go of pain and hurt and let God's healing love and blessing flow through us into the world.

Making it Personal: Can you think of a time when you struggled to let go of a hurt or disappointment? If yes, what are you being invited to let go of during this season of Lent? If you tried the *Receive & Release* practice, what words came to you as you inhaled and exhaled?

*For more on this practice, see p. 85.

Thursday, February 29, 2024

Letting Go of Trying to Change Others

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the people
I cannot change, the courage to change the one
I can, and the wisdom to know ... it's me.*

—adapted version of the Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr

This modified version of the well-known Serenity Prayer can be our guide as we seek to let go of our need to try and control or change others.

Another way to say this is that the only person we can ever change in a relationship is ourselves. Applying this to forgiveness, we sometimes make the mistake of thinking that until we can get someone else to change, we cannot forgive them. This kind of thinking then leads us to try to change that person, something that we simply don't have the power to do.

When we make forgiving another conditional on them first changing, we give them the power to affect our emotional and spiritual well-being. When we instead choose to focus on changing our own hearts and doing the hard and courageous work of practicing forgiveness, we discover that we have the ability to change and heal ourselves independently from what someone else does or doesn't do.

Making it Personal: What part of the adapted version of the Serenity Prayer most speaks to you? Looking back, can you think of a time you now regret when you worked too hard to try to change someone else? Is there someone you have been waiting on to change before you forgive them, and if so, might you begin to think differently about that now?



Friday, March 1, 2024

Letting Go and Letting Come

*The walls we build around us to keep
sadness out also keep out the joy.*

—Jim Rohn

Sometimes, we are afraid to let go of our anger and resentment toward someone who has hurt us because we believe that our anger somehow protects us. “I will never forgive this person as long as I live” may initially be a helpful and necessary self-protective strategy. Over time though, as Jim Rohn expresses above, it is possible that our self-protective anger could block the possibility of healing.

Most of us have experienced a time when we felt intense anger toward someone who hurt us. Hopefully, we also have had the experience of being able to gradually release those feelings so that our hearts could soften, which then allowed us to experience healing. Healing that would not have been possible if we had chosen to cling to our anger. The healing we experienced may have only been for ourselves, or it may have included healing and reconciliation with the person who hurt us. Either way, it is worth keeping in mind that healing can only occur after we are willing to release our anger and resentment.

While we have been reflecting on letting go this week, it is also important to reflect on letting come. Healing and joy can only begin to come when we are willing to make room for them by doing the vulnerable work of letting go.

Making it Personal: What is your response to the quote from Jim Rohn and how might it apply to the process of forgiveness? What connections do you see, or have you seen, in your life between the choice to let go, and being able to make room for healing and new life to begin?

Saturday, March 2, 2024

Listening to the Whispers

Jesus invites us to release our defensive and reactive self and join God's peace with the cracks at the center of our being.

—Lisa Senuta

This week we focused on the connection between letting go and our practice of forgiveness. The quote from Lisa Senuta's reflection from this past Sunday is a helpful summary of what we have explored this week: "Jesus invites us to release our defensive and reactive self and join God's peace with the cracks at the center of our being."

We learned that our defensive and reactive self sometimes gets in the way of our ability to practice forgiveness. We learned that letting go of our pride, resentment, and desire to change others is an integral part of our ability to forgive.

As we do each Saturday, we close our week by pausing to listen to the whispers of what God has revealed to us this week. While the quotes and writings offered in this devotional are important, even more important is your willingness to pay attention to the whispers from God. Nudges from within you are hearing as you engage with the material and focus more deeply on your own journey of forgiveness.

Making it Personal: Looking back on the readings on letting go and forgiveness, as well as revisiting any notes you have written, was there a nudge or whisper from the Spirit for you? If so, is what you are sensing a source of comfort or a source of challenge, or both? Is there something you have done or some action that you want to take regarding letting go and forgiveness?

The Third Sunday in Lent

March 3, 2024

Finding Grace in Forgiveness

Westina Matthews

Forgiveness is a heartache and difficult to achieve because strangely, it not only refuses to eliminate the original wound, but actually draws us closer to its source.

—David Whyte

I learned that he was seriously ill and not expected to live much longer. I had not been in contact with him in over 25 years. He was a former boyfriend, and the best I can say about the relationship is that it ended badly. I mean like really badly. Like I should have sent him a case of dog food as a farewell gift.

After our not-so-graceful break up, it took me a couple of years before I finally was able to forgive him. But apparently, having heard this latest news, I had not forgotten after all. In learning of his illness, I began to remember again. I rediscovered that there was still lingering resentment. A root of bitterness emerged. How is it that, after these many years later, my heart is still hardened in this spot toward this man that I had supposedly forgiven?

Where was my forgiveness? Where was my compassion?

On June 17, 2015, nine African Americans were killed during a Bible study at a church in Charleston, South Carolina. In court, families of the victims offered the gunman forgiveness and said they were praying for his soul, even as they described the pain of their loss. Following the tragic Amish school shooting of ten young schoolgirls in a one-room Amish school in October 2006, Amish neighbors visited the killer's family to comfort them in their sorrow and pain.

I wonder, are the families of those victims like me? Are they too on a life-long journey of forgiving past hurts? A journey measured



Monday, March 4, 2024

Forgiveness as a Choice

I can pray with a grateful heart for the renewed awareness of this past hurt, welcoming it as a reminder of the loving presence of God as my path to healing.

—Westina Matthews

With vulnerability and self-compassion, Westina Matthews wrote yesterday about a recent experience in which she had to choose once again to practice forgiveness with someone who had hurt her 25 years previously. Who among us hasn't had the experience of thinking we have forgiven someone and healed the hurt they caused, only to have it reawakened by something that occurs in the present?

Westina reminds us that forgiveness is a choice. She also reminds us that sometimes it is a choice that we have to make more than once when we realize that a long-ago hurt is still affecting us.

Earlier we wrote that forgiveness, like love, is not primarily a feeling, but rather an act of the will—a choice or a decision that we can make to free ourselves from the injury we either have experienced or caused. When it comes to forgiving another person, as in the story Westina shared, it is something we can do on our own. The act of forgiving is not dependent on the participation of the person who hurt us.

This week our focus will turn to more fully understanding how forgiveness is a choice, and why we would want to make this sometimes very difficult decision.

Making it Personal: What thoughts do you have about “forgiveness as a choice”? Can you think of a time when you thought you had chosen to forgive someone only to find the old hurt coming back? If so, were you able to choose to forgive again?

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

A Definition of Forgiveness

Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

—Colossians 3:13

Robert Enright is one of the leading researchers on forgiveness, and is the founder of the International Forgiveness Institute. He is also the author of, *Forgiveness is a Choice: A Step-by-Step Process for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope*. On the website of the Institute he offers the following definition of forgiveness:

When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realize that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts.

In this definition, we clearly see that forgiveness is a choice. When a person chooses to let go of their right to be resentful, they can begin the process of forgiveness. This is a choice because it involves making a conscious decision to deny the “right to the resentment.”

The definition goes on to say that to offer compassion and love to someone who has offended us is to offer that person a gift. And, as with any gift, forgiveness is always a choice. It is always a gift we can choose to give, or choose to withhold.

Making it Personal: Reread Robert Enright’s definition of forgiveness. What stands out for you? Does this definition connect with your own experience? Do you think it is missing anything?



Wednesday, March 6, 2024

Contemplative Practice: Wonder Walk

Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

—Ephesians 5:1-2 (*The Message* translation)

As we continue to explore the theme this week, we invite you to try the practice of taking a *Wonder Walk*.^{*} This contemplative way of walking connects beautifully with the theme this week of choosing to forgive. Perhaps we might choose to take a challenging relationship or decision with us as we walk to—as Ephesians tell us above—keep company with God, to listen and learn how to embody God's extravagant way of loving the world.

It doesn't matter where we walk: in nature, in our homes, a city center, or simply in our imaginations. This practice will support and strengthen our decision and commitment to open our entire being to God—not in denial or sublimation of hurts or disappointments, but with a faith in the deeper mystery and promise of God's infinite love and compassion. When we are able to choose to forgive, we will reap spiritual fruit, a rich harvest that will provide emotional and spiritual sustenance.

May we engage with this practice, not from a feeling that we need to change, but from a desire to love others and to be forgiving, as God has been so loving and forgiving toward us. May we walk and wonder in the eternal, whole-hearted love of God.

Making it Personal: If you took a Wonder Walk, were there any surprises, new awareness, or insights that came up? Did you notice anything shift in your mind and heart related to the idea that we can choose to forgive?

**For more on this practice, see p. 84.*

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Why Forgive?

(Part 1)

At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, “Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?” Jesus replied, “Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.”

—Matthew 18:21-22 (*The Message* translation)

If forgiveness is a choice, then it follows that at some point we will ask, “Why make the choice to practice forgiveness?” The reflections for both today and tomorrow will respond to this question, exploring two different motivations for choosing to forgive.

As people of faith, our first response to this question is that our faith teaches us to do so. Jesus offers numerous teachings on forgiveness, including the one above from the Gospel of Matthew. The message here could not be any clearer: when it comes to forgiveness, there is no keeping score; we are to offer forgiveness without ceasing.

Jesus’ teachings about forgiveness flow directly from his radical teachings about love, where he calls us not only to love those who love us, but especially to love our enemies, to love those we find extremely challenging to love. Extending this to forgiveness, Jesus calls us to forgive, even when it’s difficult, even when we don’t necessarily feel like it.

Jesus’ teaching about forgiveness also calls us to honest examination, like when he asks, “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3). Sometimes it is our own resistance to letting go of resentment that becomes a log in our eye, which blocks our ability to see that forgiveness is a choice. Jesus goes on to ask us to remove the log in our own eyes so that we can more clearly see the way of love that is the way of Jesus.

Making it Personal: How strongly does your faith guide your choice to practice forgiveness? Have you ever made a hard choice to forgive, not because you felt like it, but because you felt called to do so by your faith? Do you see a connection between the scripture that speaks of the log in our own eyes and choosing to forgive?



Friday, March 8, 2024

Why Forgive? (Part 2)

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.

—attributed to The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Yesterday we explored one answer to the question, “Why make the choice to practice forgiveness?”: because our faith calls us to do so. Today we focus on a second reason: practicing forgiveness is good for our well-being.

According to the Mayo Clinic website, a world renowned academic medical center, the many benefits of practicing forgiveness include:

- Healthier relationships
- Improved mental health
- Less anxiety, stress, and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- A stronger immune system
- Improved heart health
- Improved self-esteem

This is quite an extensive list that points directly to how practicing forgiveness is not just a gift we give to the person we forgive, but is also a gift we give to ourselves.

Making it Personal: How did you respond to the quote from St. Francis? What do you think about the benefits of practicing forgiveness from the Mayo Clinic? Think and/or write about a time when you experienced any of these benefits after you let go of resentment and forgave someone or forgave yourself.

Saturday, March 9, 2024

Listening to the Whispers

Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

—Corrie ten Boom

We take time once again on Saturday to listen to the whispers of what we have learned this past week about forgiveness, and specifically about our theme for this week, that forgiveness is a choice.

One of the cornerstones of being a person of faith, as we wrote in our February 23 reflection, is living a life that bears the fruits of Jesus' teachings. Two of the most important fruits of living with our faith as our compass are love and forgiveness. Thinking of love and forgiveness as fruits is helpful because it reminds us that it takes time and intention to grow these fruits. Just as one does not plant an apple tree seed and harvest apples immediately, it also takes time to see the seeds of love and forgiveness blossom.

We are now halfway through Lent and we at Living Compass pray that your Lenten journey is bearing the fruit that both you and God desire. We hope that you have experienced insights and growth in multiple areas of wellness—spiritual, emotional, physical, and relational. Rest assured that there is still plenty of time left in Lent, and ample opportunity for us to grow in our understanding and practice of forgiveness.

Making it Personal: As you look back on the past week, are there any particular thoughts, insights, or experiences you want to be sure to note? At any point this week did you find yourself being invited out of your comfort zone? If so, how are you responding to that discomfort?

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 10, 2024

Help Yourself? Help Others.

Andy Jones

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

—John 3:16

I can't hear these words, or see that biblical citation without thinking about Rainbow Hair Man. In the late 80s and 90s, Rainbow Hair Man somehow managed to get himself on camera at, what felt like, every major sports event I watched on TV. There he was, sporting a rainbow-colored afro, holding a sign that read: *John 3:16*. I couldn't see him and his sign without feeling judged. ...

... so that everyone who believes in him ...

Did I believe? Did I believe enough? Was I, in this strange made-for-TV moment, being called out and found wanting?

Now, I know that this passage has been used in just that way, to interrogate and judge people's belief in God and in Jesus, and I know that this passage, because it has been used in this way, can get some people's hackles up. That said, I think my response to Rainbow Hair Man, and his ever-present sign, had more to do with my own orientation toward the world than it did with the message itself, or even with its history of misuse.

Here's the next line from John's Gospel, John 3:17:

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

If we take the two verses as a whole, we see that God gave God's only Son, not as a means for evaluating our lives, but as the key to something more wonderful than we could ever imagine: eternal



Monday, March 11, 2024

Forgiving Ourselves

*What a gift to me, and to the people around me
... both to experience the gift of forgiveness for
myself and, in turn, to learn to forgive others.*

—Andy Jones

Yesterday Andy Jones candidly shared his personal struggle many years ago with self-criticism. He wrote, “My belief that the world is a judgmental, harsh, and unforgiving place drove me to a self-destructive perfectionism that left me ashamed and depressed. It made me judgmental, harsh, and unforgiving of the people around me. ...”

This week our focus will be practicing forgiveness toward ourselves. Andy’s reflection highlights one reason this is so important as he explained that he found himself judging others with the same harsh judgment he felt toward himself. As he came to understand that God was loving and not condemning, he moved to a place of compassion for himself that then allowed him to offer the gift of compassion and forgiveness to others.

We often hear people say that it is much easier to offer love and forgiveness to others than it is to offer that same love and forgiveness to themselves. Last week we learned that forgiveness is a choice and now we hope that our reflections this week will help us all to choose to forgive ourselves when we have fallen short. And then, looking ahead to next week, we will soon discover what Andy Jones discovered: there is a deep connection between forgiving ourselves and forgiving others.

Making it Personal: What initial thoughts do you have about practicing compassion and forgiveness toward yourself? In general, are you compassionate toward yourself, or do you tend to be overly self-critical? How does your faith guide you in practicing self-acceptance?

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

A New Path of Promise and Possibility

Although you should not erase your responsibility for the past, when you make the past your jailer, you destroy your future. It is such a great moment of liberation when you learn to forgive yourself, let the burden go, and walk out into a new path of promise and possibility.

—John O'Donohue

In our experience, there are two different ways many people have trouble forgiving themselves. The first has to do with something specific a person has done for which they are having trouble forgiving themselves. Quite often they feel deep regret about how they have hurt or betrayed someone, or how they have betrayed a core value within themselves.

A second way we have found that people seeking forgiveness experience difficulty is more general in nature. These people usually can't identify anything specific they feel bad about having done, but live with a pervasive and chronic sense of not feeling good enough, a sense that they have just never quite measured up to some internal or external standard. Further exploration usually reveals that this sense of not being good enough is related to their having internalized this message growing up, whether in their home or from the surrounding environment and culture in which they lived.

No matter the origin of the need to forgive ourselves, the path to healing is the same. First, we need to acknowledge both to God and, if possible, to someone else we trust, the real pain of not feeling worthy and of our need to forgive ourselves. Opening our hearts, to God and to another, in this way creates an opening in which we can receive God's compassion and mercy. It allows us to begin to "let the burden go, and walk out into a new path of promise and possibility."

Making it Personal: Have you ever felt your past was a "jailer" that prevents you from being free to enjoy your life in the present? Do you currently experience difficulty in forgiving yourself in either way described above? If so, what has helped or what will help you to forgive yourself?



Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Contemplative Practice: The Examen

True forgiveness is never dishonest. It is not some futile exercise in rosy self-deception. ... It is simply the gift we give ourselves that allows us to live in the present and be as God created us.

—Hugh Prather

This week we invite you to work with the Ignatian-inspired practice of the Examen*. As we work with forgiving ourselves this week, we have found the Examen to be a powerful, compassionate practice we can use to more clearly identify what might be getting in our way of forgiving ourselves.

The Examen is simply a way of paying attention, of listening to ourselves and to God at the end of the day. When we apply this process, noting times during the day when we found ourselves being our own worst critic, it can help us recognize thought patterns and habits that might be sabotaging our ability to forgive ourselves. We can ask for God's help, and this act of asking is a reminder that we are never alone, in our struggles, or in our successes. (Of course, if you ever find yourself truly stuck, by all means seek professional help from a pastor or therapist or both.)

The key is paying attention to all of our emotions, noticing times that we were hard on ourselves, as well as those moments where we were able to extend self-compassion and kindness. When we feel complete with the process, we then give every part of our day to God to hold for us as we rest. Then, as Hugh Prather wrote, we are free to “live in the present and be as God created us.”

Making it Personal: If you engaged with this practice, were you surprised by anything that came up? Did you discover ways you both support yourself and get in your own way? Were there any new insights, guidance, or inspiration you want to carry forward with you?

**We've included two versions of the Examen to consider on pp. 85–86.*

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Progress Not Perfection

Embrace being perfectly imperfect. Learn from your mistakes and forgive yourself, you'll be happier.

—Roy Bennett, *The Light in the Heart*

I (Scott) struggled with perfectionism for much of the first half of my life. It started early in school and carried over into youth sports, and then into my young adult life. I attached my self-worth to achievement and thought that the more perfect I was the more I would be loved.

I learned in midlife that perfectionism is rooted in a lack of self-love and that as a child of God I am already loved for simply being who I am. I don't need to earn that love and acceptance, and I can't do anything to lose it. This is the lesson the Prodigal Son learned when he returned home after having squandered everything his father had given him.

Social media has many wonderful aspects to it, but one downside is that it can fool us into thinking that other peoples' lives are perfect, or at least that they are happier and more successful than we are. If we are not careful, the constant and unrealistic comparison of our "insides" to the "outside images" from the lives of others can fuel perfectionism in ourselves.

The advice Roy Bennett offers in the quote is the perfect prescription for one healthy way to embrace our imperfect selves: "Embrace being perfectly imperfect. Learn from your mistakes and forgive yourselves, you'll be much happier." I know the truth of this myself as I have been much happier ever since I embraced that I am, and always will be, perfectly imperfect.

Making it Personal: Have you ever struggled with perfectionism? Do you find yourself comparing your life to the lives of others and feeling that some aspect of your life is not quite good enough? What helps you if or when you struggle with perfectionism, or comparing yourself to others?



Friday, March 15, 2024

Forgive Your Neighbor as You Forgive Yourself

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

—Matthew 22:39

A core teaching of our Christian faith is Jesus' teaching to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. The meaning of this is clear: we are to love others as much, if not more, than ourselves. Everyone is equal in God's eyes, and we are to honor the dignity and worth of every person by loving them as we love ourselves.

This teaching has a second meaning relevant to our focus this week on forgiving ourselves. From a psychological perspective, there is a strong connection between how we treat ourselves and how we treat others. If we are excessively critical of ourselves, we likely are that way toward others. If we are patient and compassionate with ourselves, we are likely that way with others, too.

Posting on her Facebook page in 2014, spiritual author Anne Lamott shared a realization of how judgmental and resentful she could be toward other parents when she was a young mother.

It took a lot of work to stick with the unpacking of the resentment to realize that it was always about self-loathing—most of these people in the trajectory of the drones I fired were pretty innocent bystanders. The lack of forgiveness had to do with really bad old feelings I had about myself. The others were just conveniently annoying.

As we learn to increase our capacity to forgive ourselves, we will likely notice that we become more forgiving of our neighbor, as well.

Making it Personal: What do you think about the connection between forgiving ourselves and forgiving others? Have you found the way you practice forgiveness of yourself similar to how you practice it toward your neighbor?

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Listening to the Whispers

The reasons for forgiving ourselves are the same as for forgiving others. It is how we become free of the past. It is how we heal and grow. It is how we make meaning out of our suffering, restore our self-esteem, and tell a new story of who we are. If forgiving others leads to an external peace, forgiving ourselves leads to an internal peace.

—Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*

We pause again here to notice and integrate what we have experienced during the past week as we focused on the importance of making time and space in our lives for practicing self-acceptance and forgiveness toward ourselves.

A core saying, expressed throughout our Living Compass wellness programs, is that “you cannot pour from an empty cup.” When we fail to practice regular self-care and renewal, our spiritual and emotional cups soon become empty, and we have little to share with others. This is true when it comes to forgiveness, as well. We will find it hard to offer forgiveness and acceptance to others if we are not regularly practicing forgiveness and acceptance toward ourselves.

The quote from Desmond and Mpho Tutu is a perfect summary of what we have been reflecting on this week. Read it again slowly, and then reflect on what it is speaking to you as you engage with the questions in the “Making It Personal” section.

Making it Personal: As you reread the quote, what stands out for you? As you think about your current practice of self-care and self-compassion and the relative fullness of your cup, are you hearing any whispers? Is there anything different you want to do as you respond to what you are sensing?

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 17, 2024

Walking into Forgiveness— A Journey or a Destination?

Anna Noon

“Solvitur ambulando”—“It is solved by walking.”

—St. Augustine of Hippo

Walking time for me, in addition to being good exercise, is good thinking and praying time. There’s something about the rhythm and pace of walking that can break free the log jams of my mind and lift my spirit when it is troubled. In the summer of 2021, after the borders opened up for international flights, and vaccinations made it possible to move out of Covid isolation, I made my way to St. Jean Pied de Port in the French Pyrenees to begin a walking pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Any pilgrim who has walked the Camino carrying a backpack is well acquainted with the weight of things. The weight of things on my mind and in my heart were just as heavy if not heavier than the pack on my back. I know that with time and distance on a journey comes perspective, provided that the time and terrain traveled is accompanied with attention and prayerful intention. I didn’t know when I set out if anything would be solved by the time I reached my destination, but I knew I needed release from the grief and hurt and loss that were magnified by being stuck inside.

Bringing only that which serves you on your journey and letting go of that which does not is essential when walking a Camino. Unpacking my bag of belongings nightly and re-packing in the morning before returning to the journey of putting one foot in front of the other; taking time to pray and sort out what hurts and needs healing; being open for new encounters, and offering gratitude for whatever is received were good practice for re-calibrating life back home.



Monday, March 18, 2024

Forgiving Family and Friends

*Choosing to forgive, to release someone or something,
to truly decide to let go and walk on, frees us to reach
the true destination, the peace that passes beyond
our human understanding, our home with God.*

—Anna Noon

This week we will focus on practicing forgiveness with the people with whom we are most closely connected: our family and friends.

Last week, as we focused on forgiving ourselves, it's possible that a regret about someone you have hurt came to mind. If so, it is likely that the person is either a family member or close friend. There is an old saying that "we only hurt the ones we love." Because we experience the deepest love and intimacy with family and close friends, there is also the capacity for the deepest hurt. We know that forgiving ourselves when we have hurt someone we love is important work. Equally important is practicing forgiving those who have hurt us.

The quote from Anna Noon's reflection reflects two of our earlier weekly themes. First, she reminds us that forgiveness is a choice. Even if we have previously chosen not to forgive someone who has hurt us, we are free to make a different choice at any time. Second, she reminds us that when we ground our choice to forgive in our faith, we are able to experience, and even offer, a peace which passes human understanding.

Making it Personal: What is your response to the saying, "we only hurt the ones we love"? Can you think of a time (perhaps right now) that you have struggled to forgive someone close to you? Can you think of a time when you experienced a deep peace after forgiving a family member or friend?

Tuesday, March 19, 2024

The Care and Maintenance of Relationships

*Human relationships are not rocket science—
they are far, far more complicated.*

—James Pennebaker

Few things affect the quality of our lives more than the quality of our relationships. At the same time, relationships are complicated, requiring an ongoing commitment to maintain and strengthen them. As the quote above says, “Human relationships are not rocket science—they are far, far more complicated.”

Longstanding relationships are often especially complicated. One reason is that we co-created patterns in these relationships that, at some point, have become automatic. If these patterns are not healthy or life-giving (for example, we agree to not ever talk about conflict), the relationship will suffer over time.

The hopeful news is we often have more agency to change and improve a relationship than we realize. While this is not always the case, we often can do things, including having difficult conversations, rather than avoiding them, to help shift a relationship stuck in a painful or unhealthy pattern. We may need to ask for professional help to do this, but with commitment and intention, change can happen.

Changing old patterns is challenging. We can see this in the interactions between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day. While changing patterns in relationships is challenging and complicated, with compassion (for ourselves and others), patience, and perseverance, it is well within our reach.

Making it Personal: Looking back, can you observe a relationship pattern that you either wished you had changed, or were able to change? Is there a relationship pattern with someone in your life right now that you would like to change?



Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Contemplative Practice: Welcoming Prayer

You have to keep saying to yourself: “I am being loved by an unconditional, unlimited love and that love allows me to be a free person, center of my own actions and decisions.” The more you can come to realize this, the more you will be able to forgive those who have hurt you and love them in their brokenness.

—Henri Nouwen

As we wrote yesterday, changing old patterns is challenging and complicated, especially in longstanding relationships. This week, we would like to suggest working with the *Welcoming Prayer Practice**. This practice can be especially helpful when we are struggling with unresolved feelings of hurt we have experienced with a close friend or family member.

When used consistently, this prayer practice has the capacity to quickly and effectively dislodge us from our habitual reactions, emotional patterns, and unhelpful mindsets. Paradoxically, this happens when we allow ourselves to relax, sink in, and be physically present to a particular experience without judging or analyzing—either ourselves or the other person or situation.

We then simply welcome and lightly name whatever is being triggered, such as *pain*, or *anger*, or *disappointment*. When we are able to welcome whatever arises in us—rather than denying or pushing the unpleasantness away—we create an atmosphere of inner hospitality. This counter-intuitive process disarms the trigger and removes its ability to continue to hurt us.

When we are able to welcome, name, and then gently let go, we naturally create conditions for forgiveness to arise from a more grounded and centered space.

Making it Personal: Can you think of a family member or friend you are struggling to forgive? If yes, how might this practice help you find a place within where you can experience whole-hearted forgiveness?

**For more on this practice, see p. 87.*

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

*It takes one person to forgive, it takes
two people to be reunited.*

—Lewis Smedes

We sometimes hear people say, “I am not able to forgive this person because there is no way I am going to let them back into my life.” Such a statement conflates forgiveness and reconciliation, when in reality, the two are separate yet related.

As we have learned, forgiveness is a choice and the person we are forgiving does not need to be involved in that choice. It’s possible the person we are forgiving has died, or is completely out of our lives at this point. Even so, a practice of forgiveness can set us free and begin to heal the pain from the injury we have experienced. When we let go of our resentment, we are free to experience a sense of freedom because the injury no longer takes up psychic and spiritual energy in our lives.

Once we have come to a place of forgiveness, then, and only then, can we decide if we want to take the additional step of reconciliation. This can only be done with the person who has hurt us and will require a sincere desire on their part to also seek forgiveness and reconciliation. It is often wise to seek counsel and support from a third party to help navigate this vulnerable process. We should never feel pressure to reconcile with a person who has hurt us if our instincts are telling us it is not wise to do so, or if we simply are not yet ready. We can give ourselves permission to choose forgiveness without reconciliation.

Making it Personal: Have you previously made the choice to forgive, but to not reconcile with a person who hurt you? If so, what did you learn from that? Are you wrestling with the choice between forgiveness and reconciliation right now with someone? Would seeking counsel help you with your decision and process?



Friday, March 22, 2024

The Power of Words

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. ... From the same mouth can come blessing and cursing.

—James 3:5-6,10

This passage uses the image of a forest fire to demonstrate the power that our words have on one another. How accurate it is that the words we speak to one another can provide blessing and nourishment to others, just as a small fire in the wilderness can help cook our food, or provide warmth and comfort on a chilly evening. James also reminds us that the words we speak to one another can just as quickly destroy and harm. And, like a human-caused forest fire, it does not matter if the hurtful words we use are spoken on purpose, or are spoken because we are being careless. They are destructive either way.

As we continue to reflect on forgiveness with our friends and families, let's take a moment to reflect on what types of fires we may be lighting with our words. Are we lighting fires that cause harm and destruction, or fires that provide nourishment and warmth? Are our words creating a blessing or a curse?

We're all familiar with the saying, "The grass is greener on the other side of the fence." We'd like to offer a different version: "The grass is greener where we water it." If we "water" the relationships in our lives with kind and generous words, they will grow in ways that are healthy and life-giving. Our words and our love and blessings are some of the best ways we can water the lives of those closest to us.

Making it Personal: Is there a family member or friend who could use some words of blessing from you right now? What do you think of the idea that "the grass is greener where we water it"? Are there any opportunities for forgiveness presenting themselves in your life right now because of harsh words that have been spoken?

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Listening to the Whispers

It is in the shelter of each other that the people live.

—Irish proverb

If you are like many, you sometimes may take for granted that you are fortunate to have shelter—a home, apartment, or some kind of physical dwelling—a place where you get to live and sleep on a daily basis. Perhaps we're not always as appreciative as we could be that we have such a shelter in our lives. We've also noticed that we often take for granted another type of shelter in which we live every day: the shelter provided by the love of friends and family. It is this kind of shelter to which the beautiful Irish proverb is referring.

This week we have been reflecting on the ways that we can provide love and shelter within our closest relationships. We offer shelter when we practice love, gratitude, patience, acceptance, and forgiveness. We refuse shelter when we withhold these acts of loving kindness toward our family and friends. Many know, all too well, that sometimes within our families we have neither received, nor provided, a loving shelter.

The reflections for this week may have stirred up some old hurt because it is not uncommon to have unresolved pain within our families and closest relationships. If this is true for you, know that you are not alone. Be kind to yourself, and if you need the personal or professional support of others, please ask for it. Forgiveness and healing are always possible, even if the opportunity for reconciliation is not.

Making it Personal: What have you experienced and learned this week about forgiveness within families? Knowing that the whispers of the Spirit can sometimes be disquieting at first, how are you responding to what is coming up for you? Is there anything you want to do differently going forward regarding practicing forgiveness with your family and other close relationships?

Palm Sunday

March 24, 2024

Bystander

Victoria L. Garvey

*Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but,
I tell you, seventy-seven times.”*

—Matthew 18:22

On the surface, forgiveness is not much in evidence in either Mark’s palm story or his passion narrative; it’s much more at home in the Lucan version. Mark, for instance, has no time for such niceties as Jesus’ plea from the cross, “Father forgive them ...” (Luke 23:34). We readers/over-hearers, however, are invited into thoughtful and sometimes disturbing contemplation about forgiveness. Not WWJD?, but who are we really and what would we have done had these events transpired in our neighborhood?

Generally, the congregation gets to play the part of “the crowd” during the liturgy of the passion these days, a role with which we’re mightily uncomfortable. We’d never have behaved that way. No, not us loyal latter-day disciples! But that first-century “crowd” shows up several times earlier in Jesus’ ministry. On those occasions, they’re always either drawn to him out of interested curiosity or enthusiastically on his side (33 times prior to Gethsemane in chapter 14). Only after Jesus’ arrest does the tide turn, and the “crowd” moves from support to condemnation because they listened to loud voices muttering fake news, because they were afraid to be counted among the risk-takers, because they feared losing hold of their own tenuous grasp of what was deemed acceptable behavior by their contemporaries.

Over and over, we are reminded that even those closest to Jesus during his ministry are capable of turning way, of betrayal and cowardice. And not just the bit part-ers—the crowd—but also Peter and Judas and the others, including the anonymous disciple who ran away half naked (Mark 14:51-52). For them, we have little



March 25, 2024

Forgiving with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind

We embrace our self-righteous non-forgiveness, however, at our peril. I cringe when I think of the times I haven't had the courage to stand against injustice, when I've stayed safely hidden in the crowd, afraid to rally to the support of others who are being unjustly treated or condemned or dismissed as less than worthy.

—Vicki Garvey

The two Gospel readings for Palm Sunday create completely different emotional reactions within us when we hear them read. The first reading tells of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as he is greeted with the words, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" The second Gospel tells the story of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. The readings together take us on quite a dramatic journey.

In yesterday's reflection, Vicki Garvey invited us to some authentic soul-searching as she challenged us to think about how we too can act like the crowd in the Passion Gospel, refusing to stand up for the injustice that is being done to Jesus. When have we "stayed safely hidden in the crowd" and not taken the risk to speak up when others are being treated unfairly?

We can do this hard work of acknowledging our sin of complacency because we know that our honest confession opens the door to forgiveness, just as it did for Jesus' followers.

Making it Personal: Can you think of a time recently when you did not speak out or act in the face of injustice? Do you want to ask for forgiveness for this? Is there someone you know who is being treated unfairly that you want to stand up for right now?

March 26, 2024

Foolishly Forgiving

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

—1 Corinthians 1:18

This passage from 1 Corinthians reminds us that much of the wisdom of the Christian faith can seem foolish in our modern world. What is sometimes associated with weakness in our culture is often just what our Christian faith teaches us to do. As we reflect on our theme this Lenten season, practicing forgiveness, we can see how this is true.

Often the world inadvertently teaches that to acknowledge wrongdoing and to ask for forgiveness are signs of weakness. An example of this would be when we see public figures making, at best, half-hearted apologies when they have been exposed in some wrongdoing. And even then, they often are only apologizing because they feel forced to do so. It appears that they associate asking for forgiveness with being weak. Our faith, though, sees asking for forgiveness as a sign of strength and honest humility.

Making it Personal: How has your understanding of forgiveness changed as a result of your reflection and practice this Lent? Do you see a contrast between Christian teachings about forgiveness and how our culture thinks of it? How does that impact your life?



March 27, 2024

We Are Never Alone

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

—Hebrews 12:1

This verse from the Letter to the Hebrews continues to be meaningful for many, especially the phrase, “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.” It reminds us that we are never alone; we are surrounded by others who support and guide us, both those who are living and those whom we love but no longer see. It is a reminder, too, of the importance of our faith community to our spiritual journey.

This passage also asks us to confess and let go of our sins so that we are able to run “the race that is set before us.” The wisdom here is twofold. First, it is because we are surrounded by the love and support of others that we are safe to be vulnerable enough to acknowledge our mistakes and wrongdoings. And second, that a regular practice of confession and forgiveness frees up our energy to be more fit to run the race that God has given us to run. Both of these pieces of wisdom are invaluable for our walk of faith.

Making it Personal: Who is in your “cloud of witnesses,” including both those who are living and those who have passed on? Can you think of a time when you were able to let go of the weight of something you did wrong, and how that freed you to be better able to run the race that God has given you to run?

Maundy Thursday

March 28, 2024

Forgiveness as a Journey

Jan Kwiatkowski

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*

—John 13:34

Facebook and other social media platforms have such an amazing capacity to keep people connected who otherwise would be disconnected. Whether it's choosing to share family pictures, cute kitten videos, humor, information or inspiration, or even planning events, social media has tremendous power to connect. I've also seen, and maybe you have too, the potential social media has to empower people to objectify, distance, and disconnect. It is evidenced in the immediate aftermath of a disagreement when one person "unfriends" or "blocks" a family member or friend. Whether it's a momentary reaction or a more permanent choice, blocking or being blocked is a powerful rejection of a relationship and our human capacity to heal and forgive.

In the Maundy Thursday Gospel, we have the familiar and beautifully intimate story of the Last Supper and Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Jesus knew that one of his disciples would betray him to those who would crucify him. Jesus knew that Peter would deny him three times. Jesus knew that those whom he loved most in this world would abandon and hurt him most deeply. And yet, Jesus showed up for the Passover meal.

Jesus could have made any number of other choices. He could have chosen to "block" himself from his disciples and the hurt that was to come. Jesus instead chose relationship and willingness. He could have unfriended his beloved friends and not shown up to dinner. But he was willing to break bread with the people who would hurt him the most. He, as Master and teacher, was willing



to take the servant position and wash the feet of those who would hurt and betray him. Jesus didn't have to do any of this ... except that this is what love looks like. And Jesus was willing to risk the power of love.

We are human. We have been hurt, and we have caused hurt. It is a painful and challenging part of our human experience. While we cannot escape the hurt, we do have a choice about what to do with it. In the story of the washing of the disciples' feet, Jesus modeled for us a significant first step in loving and forgiving, that of "being willing."

Forgiveness, especially when we have been deeply hurt by those we love the most, is a process. Sometimes, it can be a long process. And that is okay. In order to fully forgive, we have to fully acknowledge the depth of the hurt, and that can take time. There can be very good, protective, and holy reasons for letting go of the hurt in a slow, reflective process. The important thing is showing up and being willing to engage and work with whatever the process of forgiveness is, in our own lives. The important thing is not actively "blocking" the possibility of forgiveness.

When we have been deeply hurt, sometimes the most honest prayer is: "Help me be willing to show up and work the process of forgiveness that is ahead of me." A first step in dying to self and rising to new life can be humbly and humanly acknowledging that we need to ask for help to be willing to do what love requires us to do. Active willingness is a good and holy thing.

Making it Personal: How does the story of the Last Supper deepen your understanding of the process of forgiveness? How might it help you pray for forgiveness—either for yourself or for someone else?

Good Friday

March 29, 2024

God's Loving Embrace

Jan Kwiatkowski

*I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds
no more. Where there is forgiveness of these,
there is no longer any offering for sin.*

—Hebrews 10:17-18

The moment when I plant my feet, hold my arms open wide, and ready myself to catch and lift a grandchild gleefully running toward me yelling, “Nana!” is a moment I’ve experienced many times and a moment I live for. That moment can happen when I have not seen a grandchild for months due to distance. That moment can happen when one of my grandchildren is hurting for some reason, and only Nana can fix it. Open arms and a child running, just as they are, toward love is, I think, a glimpse of what it might be like when we let go and run toward Love, the love of the One who created us.

I love little kids. They are just out there with whatever it is they are feeling or experiencing in the moment. They seek out those who will love them no matter what. It doesn’t matter if they are full of joy because they just learned to put on their socks. It doesn’t matter if they just smacked a sibling and know they did something wrong. Ultimately, that child will return to their home base of love and seek assurance that they are worthy of love ... no matter what.

As we grow into adulthood, life happens, and we seem to lose or close down our innate ability to seek out the reminders that we are fully loved children of God. We think we have to fix all the things that are wrong with us before God, or others, can love us. Maybe we can’t forgive ourselves for being human and making mistakes. And if we can’t forgive and love ourselves, we ask, how could God possibly do so?



That we are much-loved children of God is one of the lessons for us at the cross on Good Friday. Many children of God were at the cross on that Friday. There was the One who was faultless. There were those who were devoted disciples and followers. There were those who could have cared less. There were those who pounded the nails through the flesh and bone of Jesus. There were the arms of God, held wide open to anyone and everyone there. And God's wide-open arms continue to be open to all of us, right here, right now.

What if dying to self—rather than anything we could actually *do*—really has more to do with letting go of what our pride, ego, or training tell us we must do to be worthy of God's love? What if rising to new life is risking running into the arms of God, just as we are, every single day? While certainly there is the final transition from death to resurrection when each of us does die, there are also countless opportunities every single day to die to self, to forgive ourselves for being somehow “less,” and to turn toward the loving arms of God.

Much like our human feet are planted and arms are held wide open for the children we love, I think God's feet are always planted, God's arms are always open wide, and God is always ready to catch and lift every human being seeking the Love only God can give. Trusting this, are we ready and willing to run toward God's loving embrace.

Making It Personal: What is the one thing God might say to you while you are being held closely in God's arms? How would the people around you know that God held you and told you that you are a much-loved child of God, no matter what?

Holy Saturday

March 30, 2024

God Waits with Us

Jan Kwiatkowski

*He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb
and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other
Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.*

—Matthew 27:60-61

This morning's Gospel tells the story of Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus so that Jesus could have a proper burial. He rolled a great stone to close the door of the tomb and left. The two Marys sat outside the tomb and waited. While we know the outcome of Easter Day, Joseph, the two Marys, and all the rest must have been beyond devastated. They could not have known what was ahead. They only knew how the story seemed to end on Good Friday. Little did they know that the story would actually begin again on Easter Sunday. That time in between can be a horrible, hopeless and dark place. It's tough to practice faithfulness when loss and ambiguity and anxiety are all around.

There are times in our lives and in our relationships where things happen, and there is a loss, ambiguity or anxiety. Maybe it's a family disagreement over a real or perceived event. Maybe it's a betrayal by an institution we trusted or company that employed us. Maybe it's a death where we never got to make peace, or say goodbye. Maybe we did the best we could to restore the relationship, and the other person did not respond. Maybe we did not try and wish we had.

Not having closure is just hard. Not being able to make sense of things is just hard. Coming to terms with the fact that maybe we should have been the one to reach out and did not is just hard. But, it is all very human. That part of the story seems both closed- and



open-ended all at the same time. A rock has been placed outside the relationship tomb, and we wait outside, longing for an end we do not yet know.

The two Marys were at the tomb on Easter morning. We don't know if they stayed and waited all night. We don't know what they did while they waited. I'm guessing they cried, they were quiet, they told the stories over and over, they reviewed their parts in the Jesus story ... and then they reached a point outside the tomb where all they could do was wait, and wait on God. I wonder if they knew and trusted that God waited with them?

If there is a situation, relationship, or time in your life that does not have a peaceful end or closure, know that God waits with you. Know that while you cry, and you go over the story, God waits with you. Know that when you are at the point where it all feels like a never-ending loss, God waits with you. Know that God is faithful in the midst of all the ambiguity, loss and anxiety. Know that what resurrection will look like is not in your hands, but that resurrection will come.

If you are like me, you are not always good at waiting. I think of Mr. Roger's song for kids: "Let's think of something to do while we're waiting." That something to do could be prayer for ourselves and the situation or person, acts of service, or could be finding a safe person to talk to about it. It could be one more time of trying to reach out or maybe reaching out for the first time. It could be prayerfully letting go, knowing God will heal in God's time. Whatever it is you do, God waits with you at the tomb, and the promise of resurrection is as real now as it was over 2,000 years ago.

Making It Personal: In whatever situation you find yourself waiting for some end, what is a kind and gentle thing you could do for yourself while you and God wait together?

Easter Sunday

March 31, 2024

From Everlasting to Everlasting

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ “This is my message for you.”

—Matthew 28:5-7

Our journey of thoughtful self-reflection on the topic of forgiveness these past six and a half weeks now leads us to be able to proclaim today:

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

We began Ash Wednesday with an invitation to consider the connections between love and forgiveness. Mariann Budde wrote about the wisdom of practicing the forgiveness we need as we grounded the practice of forgiveness in our faith. Lisa Senuta shared her experience of God as an ever-flowing river of grace when we let go and accept the gift that is our life in God.

Westina Matthew wrote candidly about her journey of finding grace in forgiveness, and that forgiveness is a choice, a decision we make. Andy Jones wrote about how, when we experience the gift of forgiveness for ourselves, we then learn to forgive others. Anna Noon shared through her experience of pilgrimage that when we forgive others, we experience the peace that passes “beyond our human understanding.”

On Palm Sunday, Vicki Garvey called us to repent the times when we have chosen to stay safely hidden in the crowd and failed to stand up to injustice. Jan Kwiatkowski reminded us that forgiveness is

Scripture, Quotes, Prayers & Practices for Lent

Scripture

But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them.

—Nehemiah 9:17

Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be—you get a fresh start, your slate’s wiped clean.

—Psalm 32:1 (*The Message* translation)

No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

—Proverbs 28:13

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye but do not notice the log in your own eye?

—Matthew 7:3

In light of all this, here’s what I want you to do. While I’m locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk—better yet, run!—on the road God called you to travel. I don’t want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don’t want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.

—Ephesians 4:1-3 (*The Message* translation)

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

—Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)

The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

—Luke 15:11-32



For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

—John 3:16–17

Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it.

—Romans 12:1-2 (*The Message* translation)

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.

—2 Corinthians 5:17-19

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

—Colossians 3:12-14

Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

—1 John 4:20

Quotes

The goal was not to have the same closeness we had growing up; rather, it was about being able to make amends and move forward. I call this kind of forgiveness conscious forgiveness—a conscious choice we make and remake over the course of our lives to forgive and move on.
—Katherine Schwarzenegger Pratt, *The Gift of Forgiveness: Inspiring Stories from Those Who Have Overcome the Unforgivable*.

If you judge people, you have no time to love them.
—paraphrase from Mother Teresa

To forgive somebody is to say one way or another, “You have done something unspeakable, and by all rights I should call it quits between us. Both my pride and my principles demand no less. However, although I make no guarantees that I will be able to forget what you’ve done, and though we may both carry the scars for life, I refuse to let it stand between us.”
—Frederick Buechner

Forgiveness springs from a changed heart, a heart that recognizes the overwhelming generosity of the divine initiative that has forgiven it, and now seeks to respond with a similar generosity by offering forgiveness to others.
—Br. David Vryhof, SSJE

Embrace being perfectly imperfect. Learn from your mistakes and forgive yourself, you’ll be happier.
—Roy Bennett, *The Light in the Heart*

The reasons for forgiving ourselves are the same as for forgiving others. It is how we become free of the past. It is how we heal and grow. It is how we make meaning out of our suffering, restore our self-esteem, and tell a new story of who we are. If forgiving others leads to an external peace, forgiving ourselves leads to an internal peace.
—Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*



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

—William Blake

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.

—attributed to the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

*I stand and wait for light
 To open the dark night.
 I stand and wait for prayer
 To come and find me here.*

—Wendell Berry, *Given Poems*

It seems that there is no end to the creative ways we humans can find to hurt each other and no end to the reasons we feel justified in doing so. There is also no end to the human capacity for healing. In each of us, there is an innate ability to create joy out of suffering, to find hope in the most hopeless situations, and to heal any relationship in need of healing.

—Desmond and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*

*If I were a perfect person, I would be bowing continuously.
 I'm not, though I pause wherever I feel this
 holiness, which is why I'm so often late coming back from wherever
 I went.*

Forgive me.

—Mary Oliver, *Forgive me*, from *Blue Horses: Poems*

To confess your sins to God is not to tell God anything God doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the bridge.

—Fredrick Buechner

I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded; not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night.

—Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner*

These are the few ways we can practice humility:

To speak as little as possible of one's self.

To mind one's own business.

Not to want to manage other people's affairs. ...

To accept contradictions and correction cheerfully.

To pass over the mistakes of others.

To accept insults and injuries.

To accept being slighted, forgotten and disliked.

To be kind and gentle even under provocation.

Never to stand on one's dignity.

To choose always the hardest.

—Mother Teresa, *The Joy in Loving: A Guide to Daily Living*

Without forgiveness and love, you will live with resentment, bitterness, malice and strife which result in more pain. You can never love without forgiving. Forgiveness deepens your ability to love and frees you from pain.

—Kemi Sogunle

You may have to declare your forgiveness a hundred times the first day and the second day, but the third day will be less and each day after, until one day you will realize that you have forgiven completely. And then one day you will pray for his wholeness. ...

—William Paul Young, *The Shack*

Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.

—Nelson Mandela



Perfectionism is the enemy of happiness. Embrace being perfectly imperfect. Learn from your mistakes and forgive yourself, you'll be happier. We make mistakes because we are imperfect. Learn from your mistakes, forgive yourself, and keep moving forward.

—Roy T. Bennett, *The Light in the Heart*

Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly. The hard truth is that all people love poorly. We need to forgive and be forgiven every day, every hour increasingly. That is the great work of love among the fellowship of the weak that is the human family.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Forgiveness is not a single act, but a matter of constant practice.

—Diana Gabaldon

The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world.

—Marianne Williamson

Forgiving is not forgetting; it's actually remembering—remembering and not using your right to hit back. It's a second chance for a new beginning. And the remembering part is particularly important. Especially if you don't want to repeat what happened.

—Desmond Tutu

Prayers

*Gracious and merciful God,
you see into the secret places of our hearts,
where we mourn our sins.
As we turn again to your grace, receive our prayers.*

—The Consultation on Common Texts, Revised Common Lectionary Prayers

*Holy One, creator of the stars and seas,
your steadfast love is shown to every living thing:
your word calls forth countless worlds and souls;
your law revives and refreshes.
Forgive our misuse of your gifts,
that we may be transformed by your wisdom
to manifest for others
the mercy of our crucified and risen Lord. Amen.*

—The Consultation on Common Texts, Revised Common Lectionary Prayers

*God of compassion,
you know our faults and yet you promised to forgive.
Keep us in your presence and give us your wisdom.
Open our hearts to gladness,
call dry bones to dance,
and restore to us the joy of your salvation. Amen.*

—The Consultation on Common Texts, Revised Common Lectionary Prayers

*O God, our times are in your hand. In the midst of uncertainty lead us by
your never-failing grace as we seek to be agents of healing, hope and
care. Walk with us through difficult times; watch over us in danger;
and give to us a spirit of compassion for all who suffer and mourn.
And finally, remind us that you have promised never to leave us, so
that even in the valley of the shadow of death your love may be felt,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Lyndon Harris



Let me stand to bear witness to you, Spirit of life, for you are my rock and my inspiration. You are all around me in the beauty of your creation, in the brightness of morning and in the evening light, constant and unchanging, but forever new and surprising. You are my wisdom and my understanding, my vision and my determination, sustaining my soul through every season. You are the living sign of justice, the source of compassion, the ground of mercy on which I rely. Your love is an endless stream, nourishing all the Earth in ways I cannot count. You are my lifetime, my heart and my hope, the inheritance from my ancestors, the strength that sustains me and the tenderness that embraces me when I close my eyes to rest in your timeless grace.

—Steven Charleston

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me show love,
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
as to console
Not so much to be understood as to understand
Not so much to be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying that we awake to eternal life. [Amen.]*

—St. Francis of Assisi

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

—Saint Teresa of Avila

Contemplative Practices

Wonder Walk

Walking as a contemplative practice is an ancient tradition, as is expressed by both Augustine: “It is solved by walking,” and Friedrich Nietzsche: “All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking.” You can learn more about contemplative walking, also known as walking meditation, on our website: LivingCompass.org/Retreaton2Feet.

The invitation to take a Wonder Walk is both for those who are able to walk, as well as for those who are not able to walk. If you are unable to walk, try this practice with your eyes closed, or while watching a video or gazing at photographs of places in nature that inspire you. There are many ways to take a Wonder Walk. Here are three simple ideas to help you get started. Note that any of these can be done solo, with another person, or with a small group.

- Choose a question, situation, or challenge you wish to ponder and wonder about, perhaps related to practicing forgiveness. As you walk, open your heart, mind, and soul to the wisdom of the Spirit as you consider, silently or aloud, “I wonder what I might do or say about _____?” “I wonder what God might guide me to do or say about _____?” Allow yourself to be curious. Don’t force an answer or resolution; simply walk and wonder about possible insights you may not previously have been able to see.
- Walk with a Scripture verse. The daily reflections in this devotional offer many choices, as well as the collection on pages 39-40.
- Walk in nature. Walk slowly, noticing the wonder of God’s creation, perhaps pausing from time to time to pay attention to things you might not notice if you were walking at your normal pace.

Loving-Kindness Prayer Practice

May you be happy.

May you be healthy.

May you be safe.

May you live with ease.

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



Receive & Release Practice

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

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

Rosebush Examen for Children* (of all ages)

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

Here are the instructions: Picture a rosebush, which has roses, thorns, and buds. Then think of them this way:

- Roses = joyful thing or things from the day.
- Thorns = a painful or challenging experience.
- Buds = possibilities for growth (hope).

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

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

Examen Practice

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

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

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

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

Centering Prayer Practice

A way to sit with God without using language. It is to consent to the Divine Presence within. Dwelling in God who dwells in us. The present moment is where we meet God and where we have an opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of God's love.

The Four Guidelines (from Thomas Keating, *Contemplative Outreach*):

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (You can pray for God to give you an image/word that is just what you need at this time.)
2. Sit comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and then silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.



3. When engaged with your thoughts,* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

*includes body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections

4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Welcoming Prayer Practice

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

Three steps for the Welcoming Prayer Practice:

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

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



The *Living Compass Podcast*, a year-round offering, provides additional enrichment opportunities during Lent by releasing three weekly episodes that focus on our theme of *Practicing Forgiveness with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*. Each episode, about six minutes long, can be found at LivingCompass.org/podcast or by searching for “Living Compass” in your favorite podcast app.



Retreat on 2 Feet is our new contemplative walking and well-being initiative. We created this experience to introduce the spiritual practice of contemplative walking, also known as walking meditation, as a way to enhance spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being. While many of our offerings focus on walking, those with mobility challenges can also participate because the primary movement we focus on is the inner, contemplative path.

For more information, visit LivingCompass.org

Living Well Through Lent 2024

*Practicing Forgiveness with All Your
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

Designed for both individual and group reflection, this 88-page devotional includes daily reflections and “making-it-personal” questions that offer an opportunity to delve deeper into the current theme during the season of Lent. We have included an additional section with prayers, Scripture, quotes, and spiritual practices related to the practice of forgiveness.

It is our hope that this devotional provides a foundation for seeking a deeper experience of Lent, an experience that will help prepare us for the true meaning of Easter.

Includes reflections from:

- Robbin Brent
- The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde
- Victoria L. Garvey
- The Rev. Andy Jones
- The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski, LMFT
- Westina Matthews, PhD
- The Rev. Anna C. Noon
- The Rev. Lisa Senuta
- The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner

Available in both print and electronic editions.
We also offer a free downloadable Facilitator Guide.

Also available:

Vivir una buena Cuaresma en el 2024: Practicando el perdón con todo el corazón, alma, fuerzas y mente—a Spanish Lent daily devotional with completely original content. Available in both print and electronic editions.



To learn more or to order visit: livingcompass.org/Lent
Questions? Contact us: info@livingcompass.org