

December 2, 2018 | [Psalm 25:1-10](#)

Whatever Became of Sin?

The celebrated doctor Karl Menninger wondered,
“Whatever became of sin?” Good question.
The smart set today dismisses sin
and God: they are dustbin notions as good as buried.
Belief in God is a modern option, but sin
through an array of names lives on to nurture guilt.
Unacknowledged and unresolved guilt will out
in untold unhealthy ways—escapism, rationalization,
physical disease, mental turmoil—unless
you speak to the one you wronged face to face,
set the record straight and ask for grace.
It is wholesome to somehow find a way to confess
old lingering wrongs, and lift the weight
of conscience groaning and withering within the heart.

December 9, 2018 | [Baruch 5:1-9](#)

Righteous Peace and Godly Glory

Jerusalem today is wearing
the garments of sullen sorrow,

but will rise to righteous peace
and godly glory tomorrow.

As day follows the night,
Jerusalem shall rise again

and show the fullness of splendor
everywhere under heaven.

Stand tall, Jerusalem,
and look to the rising sun.

Your children who marched away
in defeat are coming home.

December 16, 2018 | [Luke 3:7-18](#)

John the Baptist

Listen: You won't be saved because
you claim the lineage of Abraham.
God can raise up ordinary stones
to be the children of Abraham.

If you do not produce good fruit,
God is certain to cut you down.
There is an axe lying at your feet;
you will burn from toe to crown.

The people asked John the Baptist,
"What then should we do?"
"Share your goods with those in need;
be fair to all, to Gentile and Jew."

John was a man sent from God.
He came to testify to the light.
He proclaimed good news to the people,
but he himself was not the light.

He baptized with water, but one is coming,
he said, to baptize with the Spirit and fire.
The Messiah holds a winnowing fork
to gather wheat into his granary.

Listen: John the Baptist proclaimed
the imminent hour of the Anointed One.
John declared, "I am not the Messiah;
I was sent ahead of him.

December 23, 2018 | [Micah 5:2-5](#)

Micah

The prophet Micah foretells the fall
of the corrupt and faithless elite of Jerusalem;
the fall and revival of the Kingdom of Judah;
the Messiah's birth in the town of Bethlehem.

Because of Bethlehem, we honor Micah.
We are mindful that the great and good
often come from out of nowhere
and not from the gilded houses of the world.

Born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth
by ordinary folk Mary and Joseph,
Jesus came from out of nowhere
to shock the world into the Common Era.

December 30, 2018 | [Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7](#)

We Were Children

We were children, under the law.
We were children, under guard.

We were children, still in school.
We were children, following the rules.

We were disciplined. We were deprived.
Until the day faith arrived!

Because of faith, we are free.
Our Christian faith sets us free.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

January 6, 2019 | [Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14](#)

Inauguration Day, 2021

The test of a great civilization is how it defends all its people, especially the needy, the weak, and the poor, who do not have a voice to speak against the wealthy and their well-connected friends.

We ask our new president to reverse the trend toward a serf society. Reset the national compass to bring about true righteousness and justice.

Lift up the lowly; bring a long-sought end to suffering throughout the land. Ensure that all may live in dignity—everyone, great and small. It's Inauguration Day and America is on the mend.

January 13, 2019 | [Psalm 29](#)

The Voice of the Lord

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters
and the waters tremble before the Lord.
The voice of the Lord shakes the cedars.
The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

The Lord thunders and the wilderness quakes.
He lashes the harsh wilderness of Kadesh.
The mountains leap like wild oxen!
Lebanon skips like a youthful calf!

The Lord loosens fire and flood.
He sits enthroned as king for ever.
The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice
and we ascribe to Him the glory.

He is the Lord of earth and sky.
He gives his people the blessing of peace.
Glory be to God on high!
Glory be to the king of kings!

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

January 20, 2019 | [John 2:1-11](#)

For the Good People of the Village

The wedding party in Cana was underway!
There was music, dancing, laughter, and strong wine
for the good people of the village. Suddenly, a sign
the wine was running low threatened to ruin the day.
The ancient rabbis say, “Without wine,
there is no joy!” So Jesus told the servants
to fill the stone jars with water, and then
take to the steward this fortuitous fruit of the vine.
The steward tasted it and thanked the giddy groom
for saving the best wine for the very last.
Jesus was a man of the people, and this was his crowd.
For the good people of the village, there was always room
for simple kindness. His love was unsurpassed
for the salt of the earth, as much as love allowed.

January 27, 2019 | [1 Corinthians 12:12-31](#)

The Ideal Starting Lineup

Coaching college basketball
is not an exact science,
but you cannot have a lineup
with five 7-foot giants.

Who will handle the ball
and bring it up the court
or pass to the open man
or make the outside shot?

It's also true with short guys.
You won't be crashing the boards
or making the put-back shot
with a lineup full of guards.

The ideal starting lineup
is not a cryptic riddle.
Success always begins
with the big guy in the middle,

then add a pair of forwards
with in-the-paint talent,
a catch-and-shoot guard,
and a guard to run the point.

Complementary skills
are needed to win in sports.
In basketball, the whole must be
greater than the sum of its parts.

February 3, 2019 | [Luke 4:21-30](#)

The Brow of the Hill

Jesus spoke after reading from the prophet Isaiah, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The stunned silence was broken by one sneering villager who wondered, “What makes you so special?” (The Israelites claimed God was only on their side.) The villager asked, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” “No prophet is accepted in the prophet’s home town,” said Jesus. “The Gentiles are not to be denied: They are not created to fuel the fires of hell; Elijah sought out lodging with a widow of Zarephath and Elisha cleansed Naaman the Syrian of his leprosy.” For praising the Gentiles, the good people of Nazareth were furious. They led Jesus to the brow of the hill, but he passed through their midst to launch his ministry.

February 10, 2019 | [Isaiah 6:1-13](#)

Isaiah's Vision

Holy, holy, holy! The Lord of hosts
was seated high on a throne above the smoke.
My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.
He set his eyes on me. And then he spoke:

*Who shall I send? Who will go for me?
Here I am. Here I am, send me.*

The Lord declared: The nation fell away.
The evil, godless people did not obey the Lord.
The people laden with sin had their day.
But now the nation is humbled by the sword.

*Who shall I send? Who will go for me?
Here I am. Here I am, send me.*

The Lord declared: This nation can't be saved.
Because they stop their ears and shut their eyes,
the people are doomed to lose the life they craved.
From the smoking ruin, a nation of faith shall rise.

*Who shall I send? Who will go for me?
Here I am. Here I am, send me.*

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

February 17, 2019 | [Luke 6:17-26](#)

Beatitudes (Updated)

Seeing the crowd, he climbed the stage
and took a seat.
His close advisers joined him there.
He opened his mouth
and began to speak.

Blessed are the rich;
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who celebrate their good fortune;
they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the arrogant;
they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for power;
they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the ruthless;
they shall be treated with respect.

Blessed are the pure in ideology;
they shall see God.

Blessed are the warmakers;
they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are you when people praise you
and honor you
and speak all kinds of flattery
about you on my account;
rejoice and be glad
for your reward will be great in heaven.
This is how the rich and powerful
were treated before you.
God bless you and God bless America.

When the speaker finished these sayings,
the crowd was astonished
for he spoke to them as one who had authority
unlike all others who had come before.

February 24, 2019 | [Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42](#)

The Good Life

Put on the armor of gentleness.
Defend yourself with gentleness;
stand your ground.
Attack with gentleness;
confound your foe.

Do not envy the self-indulgent.
Self-indulgence
is a basket of perishing fruit.
For the self-indulgent,
setting out to live
is entering into death.

Refrain from anger;
leave rage alone.
Put your trust in the Lord—
your heart will be at peace.

Always show your love!
Only shadows
that cast images
of interleaving aimlessness
are real
in a world without love.

March 3, 2019 | [Luke 9:28-36](#)

Stay Awake

Jesus is on a high mountain, deep in prayer. Simon Peter and the brothers James and John are on the edge of falling asleep.

As he prays, Jesus' face begins to change and his clothes shine as bright as a lightning flash and the men are shocked to suddenly see the strange

sight of Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus about the road ahead to Jerusalem and the cross. Imagine if you are there in the company of Jesus.

Are you tempted to lose the plot? Would you suffer the loss of seeing the great hinge of history in the making as Jesus prepares to follow in his way of the cross?

The disciples witness glory by staying awake. Jesus is on the mountaintop and so are you. Stay awake! and testify to what is true.

March 10, 2019 | [Romans 10:8-13](#)

Grace for All

The prophets Isaiah and Joel assure us
that the matter of Law and achievement is flawed.
Zeal for the Law of Moses won't save us:
the word of faith is the way to God.
This is echoed by the Apostle Paul.
The end of the Law is grace for all.

Legalism is with us still. It is sad
to see justification as a joyless chore
for someone measuring good vs. bad,
wishing and hoping for a plus score.
Listen and learn from the Apostle Paul—
the end of the Law is grace for all.

March 17, 2019 | [Luke 13:31-35](#)

Unrequited Love

I admired a worldly woman
with children in her loving care.
I made my plea for love;
rejection was swift and sure.

I wanted to gather her children
as a hen protects the brood,
desiring to set their path
for destiny great and good.

Her friends and close advisors
convinced her I was a fraud
because, they said, I flouted
the Law and disrespected God.

I offered a transformation,
but now it is time to leave.
Her house is left to her.
With a heavy heart I grieve.

However, I shall return
when people with one accord
declare, "Blessed is the one
who comes in the name of the Lord."

March 24, 2019 | [Luke 13:1-9](#)

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

In nature's design, the rule of life is clear.
The useful thrive, advancing from age to age.
They manage to master time's turning page.
The useless take up space for a while, then disappear.
In God's design, uselessness is a grave offense.
If we're not bearing fruit, what good are we?
This is the lesson of the barren fig tree:
If you take sustenance from the soil, you must produce.
Unlike the natural world, in God's design
there may be room for hope and a second chance.
To achieve your promise, you might be granted grace.
But even the patient planter draws the line.
Take advantage of your one last chance
before he orders the gardener to clear the space.

March 31, 2019 | [Luke 15:1-3, 11-32](#)

Jealousy

Your father's love is certain. This you know.
All that is his is yours. You know it's true.
If you are safe and sound in your father's love
and all his blessings still belong to you,
why resent the feast for the prodigal son?
Why the sudden anger? Why the scorn?
Your brother once was lost, but now is found.
Your father must rejoice with love unbound.
Your father cares for you: What has changed?
All his goods are yours: What has changed?

For us, this tale is one we understand.
We may be safely wrapped in our father's love.
We may enjoy the gifts of his generous hand.
But a rush of jealousy can make us doubt his love.
We need to stop and ponder why we doubt.
Why the anger? What is this about?
Our father's grace extends to every child.
It pleases him when all his children are reconciled.
Our father cares for us: What has changed?
All his goods are ours: What has changed?

April 7, 2019 | [John 12:1-8](#)

You Do Not Always Have Me

The flowing lake is always filling,
but is never full.
Once there was a true sense of fullness—
of which all that now remains
is an empty print and trace.
The lake strains for completion
with waters around it—
seeking in things that are not there
the help it cannot find
—in those things that are.
Instead,
there is a chronic ache
that comes from feeling incomplete.

April 14, 2019 | [Psalm 31:9-16](#)

Rescue Me

My times are in your hand, O Lord.
Whenever my actions come to naught
and I feel as useless as a broken pot,
you rescue me.

My times are in your hand, O Lord.
Whenever I sigh and waste in grief
and flutter to earth like a falling leaf,
you rescue me.

My times are in your hand, O Lord.
Make your face to shine upon me;
let your loving kindness flow free
to rescue me.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

April 21, 2019 | [1 Corinthians 15:19-26](#)

The Ballad of the Sheaf of Corn

Easter Sunday

Bombs were falling all around
in the darkest hour of the war.
Bombs were falling in London town;
death was in the air.

Within the city, there was a parish
where the people soldiered on.
The harvest festival was a time to cherish;
the work of the church goes on.

The church was decked with local fare
on a fateful Saturday morn.
The smells of autumn filled the air.
In the center—a sheaf of corn.

It wasn't long after that
the Luftwaffe made a call.
The festive church was laid flat.
There was nothing left at all.

Rubble remained in the months ahead.
Winter turned to spring.
Green shoots rose from the dead
as summer was on the wing.

The people of the church could see in the growth
of the ruined sheaf of corn
a sign that life is stronger than death,
a sign of life reborn.

April 28, 2019 | [Revelation 1:4-8](#)

What is Truth?

Imagine truth is a sea where high above
a man can see it all, at least the surface,
but cannot hear or smell or taste or touch.
The pilot knows a fraction of the truth.

The swimmer knows a fraction of the truth.
With every nerve ablaze, he bodysurfs
selected waves on a favorite patch of sand.
His choice excludes a billion miles of beach
and vast unfathomable truth that lies between.

And kneeling by the tide, a poet holds
a chambered metaphor that seems to say it all.
The poet speaks a fraction of the truth.

A Roman governor asked, perhaps in jest,
“What is truth?” He did not wait for an answer.
Like him, we often ask and do not wait.

We cannot know the truth, the whole truth,
and nothing but the truth by ourselves.
But we of faith have a fact witness. We put
our trust in Jesus, the faithful witness of the truth
of God, who is and who was and who is to come.

May 5, 2019 | [Acts 9:1-20](#)

Brother Saul

Ananias of Damascus was minding his own business when Jesus spoke to him in a vision: “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul.” “Wait, what?” said Ananias. “Lord, many of your followers are forced to hide from this evil dude. The last I heard he was muttering threats against the saints in Jerusalem, and now he’s coming for us here in Damascus. This guy is nothing but trouble.” The Lord said to Ananias, “Go, for Saul is an instrument I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel.” Ananias pushed back, then relented. Against his better judgment he went to Saul, laid on his hands, and said, “Brother Saul.” Because of him, Saul’s sight was restored. Saul got up and was baptized. After that, Ananias is out of the story, but think about it: where would we be today without such courage?

May 12, 2019 | [Acts 9:36-43](#)

Holy People, Different People

What is a saint? The Gospel word “hagios” is often rendered as holy, but the root definition of the Greek word is different, meaning the Christian is set aside from all others. God chose

at first the nation of Israel to do his service, to be his holy people, different people. The plan foundered because proud people forgot that service, not honor, was the purpose.

We are different not because we deserve greater honor. That is not the reason. We are the least of persons. We are chosen for a greater service to God. We are saved to serve.

May 19, 2019 | [Revelation 21:1-6](#)

Hope

John of Patmos imagined a transformation
of the first heaven and the first earth
into a new heaven and a new earth;
but little has changed since the emperor Domitian.
Advances in personal comfort are commendable.
We've seen great progress by the peoples of earth
in science and engineering and in public health,
and yet the masses are still expendable.
Egregious wealth for the fortunate few
contrasts with millions who lack a home.
It was just like this in ancient Rome.
Write this: these words are trustworthy and true.
When most of the people are trying to cope,
when most of the people live without hope,
John proclaims the Christian ethos
that life is good: God is with us.

May 26, 2019 | [John 14:23-29](#)

Why Things Happen

What is our aim in life?
Snowflakes have a noble aim:
to melt.
But first,
they cloak the world in white.

The beach is bare.
The perishing sun is lighting up
the bottom half of thunderheads.
The day is done,
and Earth depends on us again
To electrify the night,
To cheer the globe
with love's outrageous light.

A multi-colored young life died
so we could see
the whiter-than-white,
sun-white face of God.

Annoyed

Paul was annoyed.
A slave girl with divination powers
followed him around in Philippi,
crying out, “These men are slaves
of the most high God,
who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”
She was mentally ill,
but her ability to foretell the future
made a lot of money
for her owners.

She annoyed Paul for many days.
Finally, he said to her spirit,
“I order you in the name of Jesus Christ
to come out of her.”
The spirit left her immediately
and she was healed.

Her owners were annoyed
because she was healed.
She lost her powers
and no longer made them any money.

The authorities in Philippi were annoyed
when the annoyed owners
dragged Paul and Silas before them
for the crime of robbing them
of an income.

Everyone was annoyed
except the imprisoned Paul and Silas,
who prayed and sang hymns
throughout the night,
and the grateful slave girl,
no longer imprisoned
in mental darkness.

June 9, 2019 | [Psalm 104](#)

All We Have

A Setting for Choir

Clothed with honor, wrapped in a robe of light,
you stretch out the heavens like a mighty tent.
You set the beams of your chambers on the waters.
You ride the gliding clouds on wings of the wind.

You make the land; the earth shall never be shaken.
You cover the earth with water like a cloak.
Waters stand above the highest mountain.
But then the waters flee at your rebuke.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.
In death, all we have returns to you.*

At the sound of thunder, the waters take to flight.
They roll down to the valleys designed for them.
You set the boundaries that waters may not pass.
Never again will waters cover the earth.

Springs pour out of the ground. Rainwater falls
for the animals and birds and every wild beast.
These waters enable grass and crops to grow.
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.
In death, all we have returns to you.*

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle in the field.
You grow the plants so people can bring forth
food from the earth and wine for cheerfulness
and daily bread to strengthen the human heart.

The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly.
Birds build their nests in the cedars of Lebanon.
The stork finds his home on the highest branches.
Wild goats are free to roam the mountains.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.
In death, all we have returns to you.*

You made the ivory moon to tell the seasons.
The sun knows its time to rise and set.
You made the night when all the forest animals
come creeping out and return at the break of day.

The young lions seek their food from God.
When the sun rises, they lie down in their dens.
People go out to their labor until the dusk.
In your wisdom, O Lord, everything is arranged.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.
In death, all we have returns to you.*

Our world is full of the disparate things you made.
Yonder is the vast expanse of the emerald sea,
filled with living things both small and great.
The Leviathan is playing. Ships go to and fro.

All creatures look to you to give them food.
You open your generous hand and they are filled.
When you hide your face, they grieve. When you take
away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.
In death, all we have returns to you.*

May the glory of the Lord endure to the end of time.
May the Lord always rejoice in his wondrous works—
he who looks on the earth and it trembles,
he who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord for as long as I live.
I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.
In death, all we have returns to you.*

June 16, 2019 | [John 16:12-15](#)

The Kindly Tutor

“I like history,” said the boy to the tutor.
“I think it would be nice to know everything
that ever happened.” The kindly tutor

looked up from his computer. “Everything?
Why?” “When someone has a question,
I could answer without a lot of thinking.”

“My friend, the study of history is a progression.
History is always being revised
and you can’t learn everything all at once.”

The tutor held up a thumb drive.
“Suppose we put every truth
of history we know for certain on this drive

and downloaded the contents for you
into your brain. You still must look
at everything and work your way through

all the data—just like reading a book.”
The tutor added, “All the information
is there right now for you to take,

but you’re not ready for everything. Education,
whether it is history or anything else,
is one long process of revelation.”

The boy acknowledged what is best:
allow the miracle of revelation to play out
and let his tutor lead the way.

June 23, 2019 | [1 Kings 19:1-15](#)

Elijah Blues

A mighty wind was blowing, but the Lord wasn't there.
An earthquake shook the mountain, but the Lord wasn't there.
I am zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts.

Fire followed the earthquake, but the Lord wasn't there.
In the sound of utter silence, the Lord was there!
I alone am left; they seek my life.

The Lord is not the wind, the Lord is not the quake,
the Lord is not the fire. But listen to the quiet:
I AM WHO I AM, the God of hosts.

June 30, 2019 | [Luke 9:51-62](#)

Make America Great Again

Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

When the Leader puts his hand to the plow,
insisting on steering while looking back,
he cannot plow a straight furrow.
The result is row after crooked row.
Our Sacred Honor is under attack.
Every patriot needs to know
the Leader is conning his credulous claque:
the good old days won't come back.

July 7, 2019 | [Galatians 6:1-16](#)

Family of Faith

Welcome to the family of faith.
Listen up: these are the rules.
The Holy Spirit is the boss.
Got that?
Your job is to pay attention
to what the boss has to say.
When the boss encourages you
to do something, you do it.
Always do as you are told.
There may be times you think
you have a better idea,
but, trust me, that never works.
You are just asking for trouble.
In the family of faith,
we bear each other's burdens.
When someone slips up,
you need to do what you can to help out.
Don't be judgmental; we are family here.
Respond with a spirit of gentleness.
And don't take comfort
in that person's misfortune.
No one is perfect—not even you.
Be humble.
Your time could be next.
Each member of the family
has strengths and weaknesses,
and we have unique responsibilities.
Don't fall into the trap
of comparing yourself to others.
The boss takes a dim view of that.
Do you understand?
You may think you are doing good work.
Even so, you could probably do better.
Right?
Be mindful of that.
We are playing the long game here.

We won't grow weary in doing what is right
because we hope to reap at harvest time
if we don't give up.

Whenever we have an opportunity,
let us work for the good of all,
and especially for those
of the family of faith.

OK, are there any questions?

July 14, 2019 | [Amos 7:7-17](#)

The Plumb Line

With a plumb-line, the wall of Israel was erected with closely-fitted, well-joined stones. These perpendicular stones were the very bones of a great nation, but a careless people neglected their promise to the Lord. They failed to stay the ruin. And now the Lord is holding a line and plummet against the wall. It is used for building up; the line is also used for tearing down as the demolition crew decides how much to raze. The Lord bears long, but the Lord won't bear forever. The herdsman Amos foretells the coming days of desolation for an errant nation who lost its way. The bowing, bulging wall is put to the measure; by the sword of justice, the edifice is swept away.

July 21, 2019 | [Amos 8:1-12](#)

You Trample on the Needy

Someone once said, “There are no second acts,”
but here I am. I am the prophet Amos of Tekoa.
I walked the earth one hundred generations ago.
Because of you, the Lord brought me back.
The most devout nation in the western world,
I am told, is America. I find that hard to believe.
Do you really think the Lord is that naïve?
You offer thoughts and prayers, but your hearts are cold.
Nothing has changed: the rich and famous are greedy.
You have the power because you have the wealth;
you have the wealth because you have the power.
Nothing has changed: you trample on the needy.
Your actions deny that persons are created equal,
and for your callousness, the Lord will lay you low.

July 28, 2019 | [Colossians 2:6-15](#)

Keep It Simple

You don't need all this extra stuff.
You were buried with Jesus Christ in baptism,
and you were also raised with him
through faith in the power of God,
who raised him from the dead.

That's it.

You have people telling you
that the simple truth preached by Jesus
and preserved in the Gospel
is not enough.
They want you to add
an elaborate system
of pseudo-philosophical thought
and accept a system of astrology
in addition to Jesus.

Then you have another group
seeking to impose circumcision
and all sorts of rules and regulations
in addition to Jesus.

People, you don't need special knowledge
and you don't need a badge of the flesh
to be faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.
Keep it simple.
Ignore these distractions
and trust in the Good News.

August 4, 2019 | [Luke 12:13-21](#)

The Parable of the Rich Fool

He who dies with the most toys wins,
a rich man said.
Today he is dead.
What do you win when death begins?

When death steals you before the dawn,
what is the measure
of stored up treasure?
Who honors you when you are gone?

August 11, 2019 | [Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16](#)

Defining Faith

The world we live in was once a lightless void.
Out of nothingness, the Lord created the world.

From things not visible, the Lord made the earth.
From a divine spark, the Lord gives us birth.

We live on the edge from dust to dust again,
yet by our faith, we understand there is a plan.

The patriarch Abraham of Ur was promised a place
where he and his seed could live at last in peace.

Obedient Abraham never doubted his descendants
would grow to be as many as the stars in the heavens.

He never touched the soil of the promised land.
He died in faith before enjoying his claim.

Hope is looking forward with wistful longing.
The outcome is unknown when fate comes calling.

Faith is looking forward with absolute surety.
Faith is a hope that has turned into a certainty.

August 18, 2019 | [Hebrews 11:29–12:2](#)

Dialog Between Athlete and Coach

A duet: Athlete (alto or tenor) and *Coach (bass)*

I ran my best, but failed to place.
My legs were dead the entire race.

I don't have wind. I don't feel strong.
Tell me: What am I doing wrong?

*Unless you change, you'll never win.
You are running races with the weight of sin.*

*The weight of sin drags you down.
A change of heart wins the crown.*

I like the pleasures that come from sin.
Unless you change, you'll never win.

*Defeat or victory is yours to choose.
The life you live is yours to lose.*

(Speaking to the congregation in unison)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

August 25, 2019 | [Jeremiah 1:4-10](#)

Excuses

We waste a lot of time making excuses. The Bible is full of them. Some are good like Moses saying, correctly, he is not eloquent. The Lord enlists brother Aaron to speak for him, and that is enough to do the job. But most excuses are offered out of indolence. For every Isaiah who says, “Here am I, send me,” many more can’t be bothered. Jeremiah is just a kid when the Lord calls on him. Now the Lord is a master salesman who knows how to handle every objection. He has heard them all! He tells the kid not to worry—He will provide the words to say, and will protect Jeremiah at all times. The Lord says to him, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. Jeremiah: see, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build up and to plant.” In our era, everything is totally different in every way except for the one dishonest excuse that never goes out of style, “I’m busy.”

September 1, 2019 | [Luke 14:1, 7-14](#)

The High Achievers

A single mom gave everything she had to her children. She took care of their urgent needs at all hours. She worked in a stressful job to put food on the table and clothes on their backs. Because of her, there was peace and harmony at home. The day came when she suffered a stroke and died. Nothing was the same again. The children devolved into anger and bitterness. Selfishness ruled the day.

The team was losing. The starting point guard was bringing the ball up the court and taking all the shots. His teammates were standing around watching—hoping to do something useful. The frustrated coach benched his leading scorer and put in an unselfish pass-first reserve who got the whole team up and running. Soon the team was pulling away for a win. The leading scorer sat at the end of the bench.

A major company wanted to increase its profits by reducing payroll, so they laid off thousands of competent older workers. The new people struggled to find their footing. Investors were glad when the stock price and quarterly earnings went up. But the company lost its edge and never recovered because of lagging productivity and the great loss of institutional memory that left with the severance checks.

The high achievers make things better, not worse, by their presence. Be honest: are you a high achiever?

September 8, 2019 | [Jeremiah 18:1-11](#)

Spoiled in the Potter's Hand

The potter was weary of throwing ordinary pots.
For the longest time, he sat at the potter's wheel
crafting useful pots with a bland appeal.
None of these pots satisfied his heart of hearts.

Each pot was slightly different, but basically the same.
I want to make a vessel, the potter allowed,
of the highest quality—something to make me proud!
The potter began his masterpiece, and gave it the name

Israel. Nothing happened according to plan.
The clay refused to cooperate. It wobbled on the wheel.
The potter could never get the proper feel,
and the flawed clay spoiled in the potter's hand.

The potter's fail unveiled a hopeful sign.
He was not able to pull the perfect from the good,
but the spoiled clay taught a lesson of what should
be done to fully achieve his true design.

September 15, 2019 | [Luke 15:1-10](#)

The Parable of the Lost Coin

Imagine a father whose child is lost
in a busy mall at Christmas time.
All is well when she is found.
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

Imagine a wife desperately searching
every room for a precious ring
until at last she holds it up.
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

Imagine lovers breaking up,
but won't accept that love is lost.
How sweet it is to reunite!
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

Imagine God's determined search
to find the lost and bring them home.
This is the parable of the lost coin.
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

September 22, 2019 | [Luke 16:1-13](#)

We All Live on Borrowed Time

The road I am traveling rises
into the arid western hills
and vanishes,
moving like my thoughts
toward an unknown end.

Soldiers die or win acclaim,
but over time it's all the same.
Oblivion shrugs at fear and fame.

Lives who touch my life
are tributaries.
They empty out their names;
in me, names are neither here nor there.

Glistening drops of dew
are strung on strands of a spider's web:
how quickly youth passes
in the turning day.

They hoard the most
who want the most;
they lose the most
who hoard the most.
Contentment is knowing
when to stop.

Like trembling leaves
are you and me.
Autumnal yellow is trembling,
trembling in the wind,
trembling, then quickly gone.

September 29, 2019 | [1 Timothy 6:6-19](#)

Godliness Combined with Contentment

We bring nothing into the world;
we leave the world with nothing.

Whatever comes our way,
we are renting—and never owning.

We should learn to be content
with gifts of food and clothing.

If blessed with more than that,
we must be tireless in sharing.

Godliness is the reverence of persons
who never stop believing

that we live in the presence of God.
Do all you can in storing

up treasures of a good foundation
for the future—for life everlasting.

October 6, 2019 | [2 Timothy 1:1-14](#)

Advice for Timothy

Knowledge is the direction for action;
action is the effect of knowledge.
Knowledge is the beginning of action;
action is the completion of knowledge.

Action does not flow from knowledge;
knowledge does not flow from action.
Knowledge and action are one.

The world does not shape the mind.
The mind gives reason to the world.
The mind is the source of all reason.
Your inner light is an innate moral goodness
and an understanding of what is good.

Be ever constant in your knowledge
that Jesus Christ is Lord.
Consequently, two actions are at one
with your constancy of knowledge:
you will never slacken in faith
and you will never slacken in love.

October 13, 2019 | [Luke 17:11-19](#)

The Alpha and Omega of Gratitude

Giving thanks in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.
Gratitude is the sum of what you sense and say.
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

Longing for things you lack is a flawed attitude.
Always be thankful for what you have today.
Feeling grateful in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.

Do not devalue the goods you currently hold.
What you have today was only hoped for yesterday.
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

Lust for things puts you in an anxious mood.
You'll find your happiness in the persons you most enjoy.
Giving thanks in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.

The lives of those you love will increase in magnitude
as you count your blessings and walk with them in the Way.
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

The ungrateful person is one who journeys in solitude.
Appreciation is the greatest kindness, far and away.
Giving thanks in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

October 20, 2019 | [2 Timothy 3:14–4:5](#)

In the Company of Nonbelievers

I wander through life in the company of nonbelievers.
My closest friends follow the Golden Rule,
but the sayings of Jesus fall on barren soil.
I am selling, but no one is buying a Redeemer.
Oddly, I am less distressed by my circle of friends,
these secular saints who truly care for the marginalized,
than the haters who, in the name of Jesus Christ,
selectively search the scriptures for churlish outcomes.
We need to heal the sick, feed the hungry,
and care for the weak among us—and always remember
we cannot love God and hate our neighbor,
for where our hearts are, there will be our treasure.
Not everyone believes in the sweet by and by,
but my thumb is on the scale for Christlike behavior.

October 27, 2019 | [Luke 18:9-14](#)

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

I'm feeling special standing in the temple.
I'm such a sight to see!
I lift my words to you my Lord.
Behold: take a look at me!

Indeed, I have risen above the rest.
Lord, you know it's true.
Unlike these fools, I mind your rules.
My bearing says, "Better than you."

[Chorus]

*Better than you,
better than you.
Lord knows
he is better than you.*

Who needs to ask? I tithe and fast.
My piety's beyond compare.
It makes me proud to show the crowd
how to strike a righteous air.

My public look is by the book.
My face is pale and wan
and I raise my hands at the proper times.
I show the people how it's done.

[Chorus]

*Better than you,
better than you.
Lord knows
he is better than you.*

The temple is blessed to witness the best;
it's all about the show.
I'll close my hour on the temple floor
with this, a truly grateful prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that I am spared
from living a life of sin
like that tax collector over there
and all the others in this room.

[Chorus]

*Better than you,
better than you.
Lord knows
he is better than you.*

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

November 3, 2019 | [Luke 19:1-10](#)

You Must Change Your Life

Rilke wrote, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern*, which is this command: “You must change your life.” It is a powerful and famous line, but what does it mean? Change to what? Rilke does not say.

The poet says this of the statue of Apollo: “For here there is no place that does not see you.” Is it fear and trembling in the presence of archaic numinousness? Does he perceive divinity in chiseled stone?

The imperative “You must change your life” suggests you have lost your way. To say you are lost implies you were once on the right path, but wandered off. The lost have already experienced the right path.

The Son of Man came to seek and to save the souls who were lost—those who wandered off. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in Jericho. He was a son of Abraham; he knew right from wrong.

He was rich from cutting corners and cheating the people. In the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus understood that he had strayed. Jesus did not command, “You must change your life.” Zacchaeus was not

doomed or damned. He was simply in the wrong place, and he changed immediately to get right with God. On the spot, he gave half of his possessions to the poor and he made four-fold payments to those defrauded.

Turnabout was more than words—it was backed by deeds to guarantee sincerity. You must change your life! Once again, Zacchaeus took his rightful place as a generous, obedient child in the household of his Father.

November 10, 2019 | [Haggai 1:15–2:9](#)

America in Decline

*Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory?
How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?*

It's like the air went out of our balloon
in 1989. The last time
we were this self-absorbed
was during the Hoover presidency
before the great depression.
The stock market crashed
and there was a national failure
of imagination for three years.
FDR rallied our spirits
and asked us all to pull together
for the greater good.
Meanwhile, in Europe,
Hitler was on the march,
invading his neighbors.
He rounded up the Jews
and others who were not members
of the Aryan Master Race.
He sent innocents to death camps
and stole their properties.
When he threatened
to crush Great Britain,
America quietly lent a hand,
then jumped in with both feet
when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.
Everyone served,
one way or another,
in this national emergency,
and we won a two-ocean war.

After the war,
we helped to build
the enduring architecture
for international peace.
We did not back down
during the ascent of the Soviet Union,
but rose to the challenge.
At home, a single worker
could support his or her family.
Company presidents and CEOs
had modest lifestyles.
We enjoyed peace abroad
and prosperity at home.

America leaned into the sixties.
Descendants of Negro slaves
demanded equality.
Half the population was female,
but women—who built the weapons
of war a few years earlier—
were unfairly treated in the workplace.
Asians incarcerated during the war
were told, “Sorry about that.”
Still, the country moved forward
as a unit.
We continued to have a sense
of national purpose.

This sense of national purpose
led us astray in the Vietnam War,
but it also enabled us to put
a man on the moon,
possibly the greatest achievement ever
by the American government.
It’s been 50 years since that moment.
What happened?

After a presidential resignation
and the end of an unpopular war,
we lost faith in our leaders.
Some people were quick to say
government could do nothing right.
We elected a president to serve
as head of our government who said,
“Government is not the solution
to our problem;
government is the problem.”
This was the national mood
when the Soviet Union fell apart
in 1989—the year we lost our edge.
“We won!” was our triumphal coda.
We bought the popular idea
that unrestrained capitalism
was superior to any kind
of government planning.

So here we are today:
the moon landing plus 50 years.
We are ruled by a reality TV star
who never reads anything,
who only cares about money
and his brand.
His mouth is a firehose of insults.
The common good means nothing to him.
Congress wallows in paralysis.
People reading their phones
bump into each other on the streets.
Anonymous avatars
post their hateful messages
on Facebook.
The captains of industry
reap outrageous sums of money
while two-income families
are on food stamps.

Does it really take a national crisis
to bring us together again—
another great depression,
a war for our very survival,
a space race,
an ideological struggle?
Can't we the people
with clear minds and kind hearts,
men and women of every origin,
come together naturally
for the good of the country?
America is in decline,
but it is not too late
for a new, inspired zenith.

November 17, 2019 | [Psalm 98](#)

After the Storm

The bearded mountain
rippled and flexed
his enormous triceps
and challenged
the many-armed sea

to a wrestling match.
Howling winds whistled
through the trees
and ravaged the watershed,
rushing down ragged cliffs

to the breakers.
Joining the fray,
sky crackled with electricity—
illuminating at intervals
roiling thunderheads

and setting fire
to tinder pockets
of dried-up understory.
Exhausted,
the land, sea and heavens

turned their eyes to the judge
of the world. Weary of conflict
they sued for peace,
and suddenly all was calm
in the presence of the Lord.

Decisions

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Luke 23:39-42

Penitent Thief

if
(condition: believe Jesus is the Messiah, yes/no)
yes
then
(result: consolation, hope, contentment)
end if

Impenitent Thief

if
(condition: believe Jesus is the Messiah, yes/no)
no
else
(result: anger, self-pity, nihilism)
end if