

Poetry Stream

Poetry for the Liturgical Calendar

David Baldwin

Micah 5:2-5

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
 who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
 from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
 when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
 to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
 in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
 to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace.

 If the Assyrians come into our land
 and tread upon our soil,
we will raise against them seven shepherds
 and eight installed as rulers.

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.

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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.

Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

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.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

Luke 4:21-30

Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." ' And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

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.

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

Isaiah 6:1-13

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.'

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!'

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!' And he said, 'Go and say to this people:

"Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand."

Make the mind of this people dull,

and stop their ears,

and shut their eyes,

so that they may not look with their eyes,

and listen with their ears,

and comprehend with their minds,

and turn and be healed.'

Then I said, 'How long, O Lord?' And he said:

'Until cities lie waste

without inhabitant,

and houses without people,

and the land is utterly desolate;

until the LORD sends everyone far away,

and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.

Even if a tenth part remains in it,

it will be burned again,

like a terebinth or an oak

whose stump remains standing

when it is felled.'

The holy seed is its stump.

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.*

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

Luke 6:17-26

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

`Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

`Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

`Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

`Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

`But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

`Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

`Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

`Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

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.

(Continues next page)

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.

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C

Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.' He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem." Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."'

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."

Second Sunday in Lent, Year C

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." '

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.

Third Sunday in Lent, Year C

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

So he told them this parable:

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."'

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?

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year C

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

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.

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year C

Psalm 31:9-16

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.
For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.

I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.
I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
For I hear the whispering of many—
terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.

But I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, 'You are my God.'
My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.

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.

Palm Sunday, Year C

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

April 21, 2019 | 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

The Ballad of the Sheaf of Corn

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.

Easter Day, Year C

Acts 16:16-34

One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, 'These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.' She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, 'These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.' The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

June 2, 2019 | Acts 16:16-34

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.

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C

1 Kings 19:1-15

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.' Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, 'Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.' He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'

He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' Then the LORD said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram.

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.

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Amos 7:7-17

This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A plumb-line.' Then the Lord said,

'See, I am setting a plumb-line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.'

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, 'Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said,

"Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land." '

And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.'

Then Amos answered Amaziah, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

'Now therefore hear the word of the LORD.

You say, "Do not prophesy against Israel,
and do not preach against the house of Isaac."

Therefore, thus says the LORD:

"Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
and your land shall be parceled out by line;
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land." '

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.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Amos 8:1-12

This is what the Lord GOD showed me—a basket of summer fruit. He said, 'Amos, what do you see?' And I said, 'A basket of summer fruit.' Then the LORD said to me, 'The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by. The songs of the temple shall become wailings on that day,' says the Lord GOD; 'the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Be silent!'

Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
saying, 'When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.'

The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.
Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and everyone mourn who lives in it,
and all of it rise like the Nile,
and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?

On that day, says the Lord GOD,
I will make the sun go down at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight.
I will turn your feasts into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on all loins,
and baldness on every head;
I will make it like the mourning for an only son,
and the end of it like a bitter day.

The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD,
when I will send a famine on the land;
not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the LORD.
They shall wander from sea to sea,
and from north to east;
they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD,
but they shall not find it.

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.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.' But he said to him, 'Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?' And he said to them, 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, "What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God.'

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?

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Hebrews 11:29–12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect.

Therefore, 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, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

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.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'
Then I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a
boy.' But the LORD said to me,
'Do not say, "I am only a boy";
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,

says the LORD.'
Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and
the LORD said to me,
'Now I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.'

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.”

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Jeremiah 18:1-11

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 'Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.' So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the LORD came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

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.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Luke 15:1-10

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

So he told them this parable: 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and s, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

'Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

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!"

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

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.

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Luke 17:11-19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'

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.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'

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.*

(Continues next page)

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.*

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

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.

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Psalm 98

A Psalm.

O sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things.

His right hand and his holy arm
have gained him victory.

The LORD has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.

Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy
at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming
to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

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.

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, Year C

Romans 15:4-13

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

'Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name';
and again he says,
'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people';
and again,
'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him';
and again Isaiah says,
'The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope.'

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

December 8, 2019 | Romans 15:4-13

Bond of Unity

The weak in faith and the strong in faith
and the honest skeptic are bound as one.
The Easter Christian and the everyday saint;
the Jew and Gentile; every man,
woman, and child without regard
for homeland, language, or color of skin:
many differences, but one in faith.
In loyalty and love, we are one.
There is one Christ for all peoples;
the bond of unity is loyalty to him.

Second Sunday of Advent, Year A

James 5:7-11

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

December 15, 2019 | James 5:7-11

The Patience of Job

The Apostle James urged his flock
in Jerusalem to follow the prophets
who spoke in the name of the Lord,
but the only prophet mentioned by James
was not a Jew.

Job was a righteous and upright man
who lived in the long-lost land of Uz
either north or south of Israel.
Where is Uz?
No one knows for sure.

Job was kind and fair to every person
both great and small
even in the midst of Satan's harsh trials.
Job was clear-eyed.
He knew he had done nothing wrong
to deserve misfortune.

James admired his self-awareness!
It was *this example* of a good man
suffering for no apparent reason
that James offered up to his congregation.
Stop fighting among yourselves.
Be patient and steadfast in your faith
until the day and hour
the Judge is standing in the door.

Third Sunday of Advent, Year A.

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

December 25, 2019 | Isaiah 9:2-7

Long Night's Journey into Day

In former times, we toiled at night.
We toiled in shadows from black to gray.
But then, behold! The emerging light!
In our long night's journey into day.

In our long night's journey into day,
the light of the Lord is beaming bright.
We praise the Lord and dance for joy.
The Lord of Hosts relieves our plight.

All the boots of tramping warriors
and bloody garments torn asunder
are burning now in pungent fires.
We exult like a people dividing plunder.

A child is born; a son is given;
authority rests in Him today.
We thank the Lord for sins forgiven
and our long night's journey into day.

Christmas Day, Year A

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."') From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

December 29, 2019 | John 1:1-18

Son of Man

The son of man comes to earth.
Like you and me, he draws a breath.
His life is much like ours: a birth,
a coming of age, and then a death.

The son of man is the suffering servant.
He shoulders sins for a world in pain.
It is his role to lift our burden.
He suffers, he dies, he comes again.

The son of man is the sovereign power
to come in glory on judgment day.
No one knows the date and hour
our floating world will pass away.

The son of man is all in one:
person, servant, magistrate.
The faithful are one with the son of man.
He governs all, both small and great.

First Sunday after Christmas, Year A

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel." "

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

January 6, 2020 | Matthew 2:1-12

Herod the Great

A popular belief was abroad in the kingdom of Judea. Scholars concluded that seventy-six generations had passed since the Creation, and that the next, the seventy-seventh, would gift to Israel the Messiah who was destined to deliver the nation from foreign rule.

A child born in Bethlehem would be the king of the Jews—as foretold by the prophet Micah. The Magi spoke these words to Herod the Great. Herod was frightened, but he feigned excitement. He said to the Magi, “Go and search diligently

for the child; and when you find him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” At the time, he was terminally ill with a hideous disease. His career was one with many bold accomplishments; it was also one of cruelty, vengeance, and paranoia,

traits in overdrive at the time of the birth of Jesus. Herod was thoroughly Roman in murdering each and every rival to his rule, including his wife and three of his sons. He murdered hundreds more real and perceived enemies in his final years

as he assured his lasting legacy in the line of succession. In the end, nothing happened to the child of Bethlehem. No one mourned for Herod, a converted Jew—the son of an Edomite father and an Arab mother—who did the dirty work for the hated Roman state.

The Epiphany, Year A

Isaiah 42:1-9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:
I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
I am the LORD, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.
See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

January 12, 2020 | Isaiah 42:1-9

All the Way to the Coastlands

Isaiah's camera lens is zooming out
from a close-up shot showing the rubble and despair
of occupied Israel to a wide-angle view,
a cosmic view, of all the nations of the world.
God is not a tribal deity who assures
military mastery or material success for Israel.
He created the heavens and stretched out the earth.
He cares for all living and breathing creatures.

Isaiah promises a spirit-filled servant—
not a conqueror or a tyrant. The servant is the face of justice.
Hard power is swept aside by justice!
The servant will persist until a sense of fairness
holds sway all the way to the coastlands.
Even in this hour as it endures a humiliating plight,
Israel should look beyond itself and serve as a light
to the world by inspiring justice in every land.

First Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

Hebrews 2:14-18

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

February 2, 2020 | Hebrews 2:14-18

What Kind of God?

The gods consume nectar and ambrosia on Olympus
and amuse themselves by looking down on us
dispassionately. Cool detachment is a sardonic business.
Hellenism insists we see things as they are.
For right thinking, the body and its desires are a barrier;
we are cautioned to keep the mind completely clear.

Hebraism counters that the body and its desires
are a barrier to right action. The Lord requires
clarity of thought chastened by strictness of conscience.
The principal rubric of the Law is studied obedience
to the will of God. The Lord has a vertical presence—
aloof except to chastise with corrective fires.

The unknown author of the book of Hebrews crystalizes
the Christology of Paul by defining a different kind
of divinity in which the pioneer of our salvation identifies
with the human condition. Jesus is wholly man
as well as divine and, thus, he thoroughly understands
what it means for us to live imperfect lives.

But there is more. It is well and good to know
the Lord has empathy, unlike the dispassionate pantheon
or the distant God of Moses. It begs the question:
what can be done about our suffering and sorrow?
The pioneer of our salvation has come to earth to show us
exactly what we need for true consolation.

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' '

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you",
and "On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." '

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him." '

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

March 1, 2020 | Matthew 4:1-11

This is a Test

The verbs *to tempt* and *to test* are not the same.
God did not tempt Abraham to sacrifice his one
and only child, Isaac. For it is written,
“After these things God tested Abraham.”
The devil tempted Jesus to turn stones
into bread to prove he is the son of God.
The devil tempted Jesus to leap from the façade
of the temple and force the angels to cushion his bones.
The devil tempted Jesus with his biggest and best
offer: the splendor of earthly kingdoms if he,
in turn, would worship him; Jesus refused.
Temptations bedevil us every hour of every day
as befits our nature, but do not be confused
when the Lord requires your service: *This is a test.*

First Sunday in Lent, Year A

John 4:5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice

together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labor.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.'

March 15, 2020 | John 4:5-42

Breaking Bigotry

He broke a rule by talking to a woman.
Women are not to be diminished!
With the woman at the well, he shows us how
to break the rules of gender bigotry.

He broke a rule by talking to a Samaritan.
The woman at the well was part Assyrian.
With the woman at the well, he shows us how
to break the rules of racial bigotry.

He broke a rule by promising a schismatic
Israelite the gift of living water.
With the woman at the well, he shows us how
to break the rules of religious bigotry.

Jesus broke all the rules
that soured his world—and ours today.
Breaking bigotry is job one;
Jesus shows us how it's done.

Third Sunday in Lent, Year A

Matthew 27:32-37

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

April 5, 2020 | Matthew 27:11-54

A Moment of Kindness

It was a long time ago,
when I was young and in my prime.
I was entering the city for Passover. Lo and behold,

prisoners were leaving the city at the same time
for their executions. One was Jesus.
He was weak from scourging as he struggled to climb

to the place Golgotha while carrying the cross.
Seeing that I was a Jew,
a Roman soldier tapped me aside the face

with the flat of his sword, and said, "You."
Pressed into lethal service for the Roman
state, I knew what I had to do.

"Brother, let me lift your burden,"
I said, as I hoisted the wood shoulder high.
Together, we walked the hill to his certain

death. I wonder why
happenstance put me in that time and space.
Why me? Of all the events under the sky,

why I was plucked to show some grace?
I was in the right place at the right time.
A moment of kindness can last a lifetime.

Palm Sunday, Year A

Luke 24:13-49

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

April 12, 2020 | Luke 24:13-49

Ordinary

Their eyes were opened with the breaking of bread,
an ordinary loaf in an ordinary home.
Until that moment, Cleopas and his companion
only knew him as an inquisitive stranger.

They could have let him go his way,
but, no, the men invited him to stay
and share with them an ordinary meal.
By inviting him to stay, they made a choice.
You, too, are free to choose.

The communion table is not the only
place where a meal is shared with the Lord.
He is not just the host at the table;
he is the guest invited into the home.

Easter Day, Year A

John 10:1-10

'Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

May 3, 2020 | John 10:1-10

Job Posting: Shepherd

We have an opening for a shepherd of human beings.
Are you tough enough for the task?

People are not that bright. They are always leaving
the area for greener grass
and it's your job to track them down
and bring the bumblebees back to the home pasture.

People need to be watched: you must be around
at all hours, night and day,
always close to ground.

Like sheep, people wander off and are prey
to metaphoric wolves who wait patiently
for suckers to come their way—
you are constantly correcting for human naïveté.

Compensation comes in the intangible of knowing
you are keeping blameless people from carelessly
endangering themselves.

Apply now:
it's a job fit for a king
if you have a passion for doing the right thing.

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year A

Acts 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring."

Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'

May 17, 2020 | Acts 17:22-31

Perennial Philosophy

Streaming from the prism between the people and God
are seven point seven billion slivers of light.
A stunning diversity of color is flowing from the white.
Each sliver is unique on the limitless color wheel.

Red, orange, yellow, green, blue,
indigo, and violet are at one with the original whole.
The rainbow is one continuum, like branches and the bole,
connecting people with people and the people with God.

Extinguish the light source and the colors disappear!
All human diversity is part of a greater unity.
Our sense of a separate self is a functional necessity,
but the focus on the separate self is the cause of suffering.

Focus instead on the infinite divine self,
which represents true reality, and you will find
the source of light for the life of all mankind
beyond the prism between the people and God.

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

May 31, 2020 | 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

You Don't Need to Be a Superhero

No, we are not characters in comic books,
in movies, or in video games
in which the superheroes crack the crooks,
where each character has a claim
to fame—a special superpower that complements
every other character in the gang's
fantastical array of tools to fight crimes.

No, we are not like that.

All our spiritual gifts come
from the same Holy Spirit—
who gives us knowledge, faith, healing, and wisdom;
who enables miracles; who inspires the prophet;
who grants spiritual discernment to some
and to others proficiency in speech.

No, you don't need to be a superhero to earn
your place. You don't need to preach or teach
or do anything. Unwavering faith will suffice
to be a member of the body of Christ.

Day of Pentecost, Year A

Genesis 1:9–13, 2:1-3

And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day...

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

June 7, 2020 | Genesis 1:1–2:4a

Wheel of Water

Grass emerges from the winter snow.
Blades lengthen. Flowers grow.
Trees in the wind sway and sough.
The summer of life is all we know!

Autumn breezes start to blow
and all of life begins to slow.
Brown turf is snuffed in snow.
Life and death come and go.

Clouds roll in over the plain.
The clouds release their drops of rain.
The drops are lost in the narrowing drain
to the sea. Only to rise again.

The wheel of water is an endless chain,
an infinite loop of wax and wane.
The land upholds this loss and gain.
Yet the land itself cannot sustain.

Dust is molded, dust restored.
Not even the land can say: *Never*.
But for children of light who love the Lord,
the love of the Lord lasts forever.

Trinity Sunday, Year A

Matthew 9:35–10:8

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.'

June 14, 2020 | Matthew 9:35–10:8

When Jesus Saw the Crowds

When Jesus saw the crowds,
he felt the world's pain—
for the sick, the blind, and the troubled
trapped in the grip of demons.

When Jesus saw the crowds,
he felt the world's sorrow.
He wanted to wipe away
tears from every eye.

When Jesus saw the crowds,
he felt the world's hunger.
The tired and hungry sheep
looked up, waiting to be fed.

When Jesus saw the crowds,
he felt for those cut off.
He cared for the lonely leper
banished from the village square.

When Jesus saw the crowds,
he felt the world's bewilderment.
The people, longing for God,
were given rules instead.

The people were harassed and helpless
like sheep without a shepherd.
When Jesus saw the crowds,
he was moved by divine compassion.

(Continues next page)

The world has greatly changed
since Jesus saw the crowds.
But we still have pain and sorrow;
we still have hunger and loneliness;

and we still have bewilderment.
The Gospel remains the same.
He is moved by divine compassion
for the crowds of the dispossessed.

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Romans 6:1-11

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

June 21, 2020 | Romans 6:1-11

Dorm Room Bull Session

“Where sin increases, grace abounds all the more,”
said Paul to his roommate, the sophomore philosophy major
who offered this devil’s-advocate wager.

“I propose to you: the more we sin, the more

God’s grace shall abound. Thus, we should sin
with gladness so grace abounds all the more.
By sinning more, we are doing God a favor
since he loves granting grace to those who sin.”

Paul frowned and countered the jest with commonsense.

“Once we die to sin, why would we stay
in that condition? Why would the emancipated slave
stay with an abusive master? Does that make sense?

If you were released from prison, would you go back
to your cell or would you choose to live free?
The question answers itself. If you won the lottery,
would you continue to live in an old shack?”

Paul’s interlocutor loved to bedevil and astound,
especially in a deep discussion of sin and grace.
He said, “I just like to see you red in the face.”
Paul was laughing as they wandered out for a round.

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Romans 6:12-23

Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

June 28, 2020 | Romans 6:12-23

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 good to somehow find a way to confess
old lingering wrongs, and lift the weight
of a wounded conscience wavering in the heart.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn."

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.'

At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

July 5, 2020 | Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

The Yoke

The yoke you wear is the load you bear.
Who will make the yoke you wear?

The yoke you wear is yours alone.
Will you design and build it on your own?

Will you fashion failure for your load?
Will fear burden you on the darkened road?

Will you shoulder anger on the morrow
or shoulder some remembered sorrow?

A worker in wood has a better way
to lighten your load in every way.

You can trust the carpenter's son.
He knows why and how it's done.

Jesus knows the grain of oak.
He will make you a gentle yoke.

His heart is humble—learn from him.
Take his yoke and walk with him.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.'

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.'

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

July 26, 2020 | Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The kingdom of God began
with a solitary man.

The solitary man
was a tiny seed of one.

Growth began the hour
Jesus revealed his power.

The kingdom of God grew
when Jesus added two.

The kingdom grew some more
when followers numbered four.

There were twelve until the day
a follower fell away.

A handful grew into thousands
and thousands into millions.

Nothing on this earth
is fully formed at birth.

From a tiny seed of one
a mighty tree was born.

We rose from the garden sod:
behold the kingdom of God.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Romans 14:1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. For it is written,

'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.'
So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

September 13, 2020 | Romans 14:1-12

My Moment in Time

Curving through a basalt cut,
the slim-waisted river brings
waters from the Two Oceans Plateau
at Jackson Lake to the faraway waters
out west, all the way to Astoria.
Cache Peak is due south.
Smooth-sanded alluvial fans
are tan with flecks of sagebrush teal.
To the north, the massive Craters of the Moon
lava fields lie between the river
and the distant mountains of central Idaho.

I stand alone in this isolated spot.
Civilization is nowhere in sight.
Little has changed since the Bonneville Flood
scoured the Portneuf River Valley
at the end of the Ice Age or even
when the first people arrived more
than ten thousand years ago.

This moment by the river—my moment
in time—is a one-of-a-kind snapshot
in the millions of years that some version
of the Snake River flowed to the Pacific.
This tiny stretch of river is not
the complete river any more than lives
exists in isolation apart from all the brothers
and sisters of the past, present, and future.

Like the island in the stream parting the waters,
it isn't you who travels forward.
The small measure of time meant for you
travels toward you and beyond you.

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Matthew 20:1-16

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

September 20, 2020 | Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

I was an L.A. kid. My favorite sport
was baseball. The weather was always kind
enough for a game. My friends and I
knew the batting averages and the earned run
averages of the players in the PCL,
and all the major league stats. I followed the Angels.
It was always a treat to go to Wrigley Field
with my dad and watch the Angels play ball.
I never went without some friends from school.

One Saturday, my dad took me and two
of my friends to an Angels game. We sat near
the back of the lower section overlooking
first base. There was a section in front of us
right by the visitors' dugout completely empty.
These seats were the most expensive in the park,
but today, those ticket holders did not show up.

Wrigley had a custom to let the local kids
into the stands after a couple of innings,
just to fill up the ballpark. It was a neighborly policy
with the surrounding community in south L.A.
and it helped to boost the noise for the home team.

When a boisterous group of black kids commandeered
the seats in the coveted section down below,
a man sitting near us began to grumble
about them in a loud voice. This same man
was telling his companion at the start of the game
how pleased he was with his seats at the ballpark.
He did have great seats, but it made him angry
when poor kids sat closer to the action.

(Continues next page)

The man complained and muttered racial slurs
for two innings before my father finally
had enough. Dad was sure the commentary
was ruining the experience for me and my friends.
After one racist rant too many, my father turned
to him and said, “Hey, knock it off.
We’re trying to watch the game.” The man was caught
off guard, “Well, it isn’t fair. I paid good money
for these seats, and those kids don’t deserve
the luxury box.” Dad said, “I heard you bragging
about your seats when you came in. You said
they were perfect. What happened? Relax,”
he said gesturing toward the buoyant fans
in the stands, “enjoy the game with the rest of us.”

It worked. We never heard another word.
Later, my dad explained it this way:
“It is a gift just to be there at Wrigley Field
where the sun is shining and the Angels are winning.
Be happy. It doesn’t matter where you sit.”

NOTE: This Wrigley Field was the minor league home of the old Los Angeles Angels of the Pacific Coast League. The Angels were the AAA farm club of the Chicago Cubs in the National League. The Cubs played in a much larger Wrigley Field in Chicago.

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Matthew 21:33-46

'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:
"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes"?'

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

October 4, 2020 | Matthew 21:33-46

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

Hear a parable! The Lord created a vineyard.
No other estate in the realm was quite so grand.
He planted a thorny hedge on the outer edge
to keep the thieves and animals from breaking in.
He built the perfect winepress for the grapes.
He raised a tower to house the vineyard tenants.

Before he leased the land, the Lord commanded
that the tenants care for the land and pay their rent.
He then withdrew to live in a distant land.
At harvest time, the Lord dispatched a messenger
to ask the tenants to pay the Lord a share
of the produce. The messenger was beaten and sent away.

The patient Lord sent more messengers,
one after the other, to collect the promised rent.
But the result was always the same—all the messengers
were beaten, stoned, or killed by the wicked tenants.
Finally, the Lord decided to send his son.
The Lord declared, “The tenants will respect my son.”

Instead, the wicked tenants seized the son.
They murdered the son and cast him out of the vineyard.
By this they hoped to gain the son’s inheritance.
The Lord was furious the tenants killed his son.
His patience spent, he vowed to purge the vineyard.
He expelled the tenants and gave the vineyard to others.

It was Jesus himself who said: *Hear a parable!*
The chief priests and the elders of the people knew
exactly who the wicked tenants were.
They knew the messengers represented the prophets.
They knew what Jesus meant when he quoted the psalm,
The stone the builders rejected became the cornerstone.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet." But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." For many are called, but few are chosen.'

October 11, 2020 | Matthew 22:1-14

The Parable of the Great Banquet

The wedding feast was ready.
Musicians were tuning up.
The table was groaning with food
and wine filled the cups.

The king invited the best
of subjects, but all withdrew.
They turned him down because
they had better things to do.

One was busy with his oxen.
One was peddling his wares.
One was recently married.
They turned to their own affairs.

The king opened his doors
to all, both good and bad,
to the poor, the crippled, the blind,
and the lame—and they were glad!

They were glad to eat and drink.
As persons, they were the least,
but the king was glad his guests
were grateful to join his feast.

Christian, are you prepared
for the king's banquet fare?
Prepare your heart for God
and open your heart to the poor.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Psalm 90

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.
Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn us back to dust,
and say, 'Turn back, you mortals.'
For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.

You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.

For we are consumed by your anger;
by your wrath we are overwhelmed.
You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

For all our days pass away under your wrath;
our years come to an end like a sigh.
The days of our life are seventy years,
or perhaps eighty, if we are strong;
even then their span is only toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.

Who considers the power of your anger?
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you.
So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart.

November 15, 2020 | Psalm 90:1-12

A Tale that is Told

The storyteller tells our years.
For each of us, the events are new.
The storyteller gives us tears
and laughter, and love false and true.

The days unfold from birth to death.
We cannot keep from growing old.
Our lives are over as in a breath.
Our journey ends as a tale that is told.

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Mark 13:24-37

'But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

November 29, 2020 | Mark 13:24-37

Evening, Midnight, Cockcrow, Dawn

Watchman, wake. Awake and rise!
You must be ready when the master comes.
Don't let him catch you by surprise

in the evening,
at midnight,
at cockcrow
or at dawn.

Watchman: this charge is yours to keep.
The master comes in a sudden rush.
Don't let him find you sound asleep

in the evening,
at midnight,
at cockcrow
or at dawn.

Watchman, wake. Open your eyes!
You cannot know the urgent hour,
the hour when the master of the house arrives

in the evening,
at midnight,
at cockcrow
or at dawn.

First Sunday of Advent, Year B

Psalm 72

Of Solomon.

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.
May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.

May he live while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts.
May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.

For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.

January 6, 2021 | Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Laozi Advises the Board of Directors

The best manager is a gracious guest in my house.
As host, I am pleased to do my best.
We both get what we want.

The best manager is hardly recognized.
Good results come naturally
and the workers say, “We did it all ourselves!”

The worst manager is known too well:
from below—resentment, hatred, fear;
from above—a ruthless rising star.

Results destroy the worst manager.
Until that day, how many broken lives
will litter the shop floor?

If managers have no further desire
than to embrace and protect, the workers
will have no further desire than to enter and serve.

The Epiphany, Year B

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

January 10, 2021 | Genesis 1:1-5

The Lake

Intuitive images of truth
from out of the liquid eye

are writ in stagnant brown
when scuttling winds are shy

or lush voluptuous blue
erotic as a lover's sigh

or red on twilight orange
where the blood syllables fly.

The poet dreams his life
as the lake dreams the sky.

First Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

January 17, 2021 | John 1:43-51

Can Anything Good Come Out of Nazareth?

The students at Cana High School looked
askance at their boondocks rival, Nazareth High.
Cana was college prep all the way;
the Nazarenes studied the trades as well as books.
Cana derided the neighbors, and it was no surprise
they took to fleering and flaunting, deploying the epithet,
“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
As it happened, Nazareth High won a coveted prize
as the best secondary school in the entire state
because it uplifted every student in town
and not just the affluent college bound.
How painful it was for Cana to bend the knee
to Nazareth! The lesson learned is do not denigrate
ignorantly, but follow the counsel, “Come and see.”

Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

January 24, 2012 | Mark 1:14-20

Simon, Andrew, James and John

Time is fulfilled; prepare for the dawn.
The Lord enlists his first followers—
Simon, Andrew, James and John.

The law and the prophets have reached an end
as John the Baptist is handed over.
Time is fulfilled; behold the dawn.

The first followers are ordinary men,
unlettered fishermen—two sets of brothers:
Simon and Andrew, and James and John.

The good news is now proclaimed
to a world weary of jot and tittle.
Time is fulfilled; welcome the dawn

as the hinge of history is about to turn.
The suffering servant is in the middle
as Simon, Andrew, James and John

are stunned by the gravity of the Lord's command,
and drop everything to be his followers.
Time is fulfilled; embrace the dawn
with Simon, Andrew, James and John.

Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe betide me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

February 7, 2021 | 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Inclusion

Inclusion comes through love. Love makes it real.
In the name of love, barriers pass away.
When Jesus walked the earth in the imperial day
of Tiberius, gentiles were shunned by society in Israel
and a wall divided the people with dreams unclear
from those who lived in the hope of a promised lord.
Love joined the two. As Isaiah said,
“Peace, peace to the far and to the near.”

How much has really changed since Caesar’s day?
We live in times when hate is in the air.
We seek a certain solace in the tribal fold,
but mindfulness cancels hate; inclusion is the way.
Instead of disputations to win over the neighbor,
we offer the power of love to embrace and hold.

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B

Mark 8:31-38

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

February 28, 2021 | Mark 8:31-38

Mission Impossible

Good morning, Simon Peter.
The son of man is not
the warrior king you think
he is. He is a suffering servant
who comes in peace and love.
Rejected by those in power
and sentenced to death on a cross
of shame, he will rise again
three days later.
The son of man has explained
this course of events to you
and your friends several times,
but you do not listen.
Do you not yet understand?
Your mission, should you decide
to accept, is to take up the cross
of Christ and follow him;
for it makes little sense
to gain the whole world
only to lose life eternal.
This tape will self-destruct
in five seconds. Good luck, Peter.

Second Sunday in Lent, Year B

Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

March 14, 2021 | Ephesians 2:1-10

Don't Worry About Tomorrow

Look at the birds of the air
who neither sow nor reap
nor gather goods into barns.
Birds don't worry at all.
The Lord provides their food.
Don't worry about tomorrow.

Look at the lilies of the field
who neither toil nor spin.
They dress in costly attire
more elegant than that of a king.
The Lord provides their clothes.
Don't worry about tomorrow.

Birds give glory in song;
flowers give glory in beauty;
If you will strive for righteousness
and give to God the glory,
The Lord will always provide.
Don't worry about tomorrow.

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year B

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

March 21, 2021 | Jeremiah 31:31-34

Imprint of the Law

Word-of-mouth dictation of the Law
from God's lips to man's ear
is amended or corrupted over time
as oral tradition is less than perfect.
Scholars and teachers of the Law have differing
theories from one generation to the next.
The mind reacts to the word of God
by carving sacred scripture into stone
or writing on clay to be baked in a kiln,
but these are things that can be smashed.
The Law fades when parchment rots.
The Law is ash when papyrus burns.
Bronze Age media are perishable
and speech is like a game of Telephone.
The time is near when the imprint of the Law
is stamped on every human heart,
so each person, from the very least
to the greatest, shall know the Law intuitively.

Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year B

Psalm 118

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures for ever!

Let Israel say,
'His steadfast love endures for ever.'
Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.

This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
This is the LORD's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!
O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
We bless you from the house of the LORD.
The LORD is God,
and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures for ever.

March 28, 2021 | Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Rejection

*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.*

Psalm 118:22

The great American poet was gravely ill.
Confined to home, he was game enough for an interview.
As I was ushered into his august presence,
I noticed letterhead papers taped to the walls
of the rooms, corner to corner from floor to ceiling.
Each was a version of, “Sorry, not for us.”
Of course, I started to laugh, which was the point.
The old man’s voice was soft but clear:
“The rejection letters keep me humble,” he said.
“I often wonder where the editors and publishers—
these gatekeepers—are today with their insights.
The uncharted path is hard to follow at first.
I get that. Sometimes it takes a while
for the world to come around to the unforeseen reality
that a loathed new idea despised by the authorities
will be the conceptual capstone of the coming age.”

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday, Year B

John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

May 9, 2021 | John 15:9-17

Clicking Hyperlinks

Above all, love is seen in the love
of the Father. When we click on the word *Father*,
it opens on the Father's love for the Son.
When we click on the word *Son*,
it opens on the Son's declaration
that he shows his love for the world
by laying down his life for his friends.
When we click on the word *friends*,
we learn they are friends of the Son
for as long as they follow the commands
of the Father to love one another.
Reading the unfolding message
of the Gospel of John
is an endless explosion and expansion
of hyperlinks where all words
are interconnected and self-referential,
summed in the seamless command of *love*.

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year B

God the Creator and Provider

Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
 creeping things innumerable are there,
 living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
 and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you
 to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
 when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
 when you take away their breath, they die
 and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
 and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the LORD endure for ever;
 may the LORD rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
 who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
 I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
 for I rejoice in the LORD.
Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
 and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the LORD, O my soul.
Praise the LORD!

May 23, 2021 | Psalm 104:25-35

Into the Winter

*When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.*

Psalm 104:29

In a far field of broken turf and mud,
a quarter horse stands statue-still.
The sunless sky trades its feathery mist
for twisting steam from out of the pasture thaw.
A puff of breath betrays a living death.
The horse is dying; legs are stiff as stone.
Where once he raced from line to picket line
of ragged timber that rims the rolling farm,
today he labors long at standing still.

Day of Pentecost, Year B

Mark 4:26-34

He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

June 13, 2021 | Mark 4:26-34

The Parable of the Growing Seed

The kingdom of God is like a seed
the farmer pushes into the soil.
Seed and soil produce themselves,
but growth quickens through the farmer's toil.

After the planting, the farmer waits.
He sleeps and rises night and day.
The seed will grow; he knows not how.
He watches and waits for the wakening day.

First the stalk, and then the head,
and then the full grain at the top.
When the grain is full, the farmer goes
in with his sickle to harvest the crop.

Seed and soil produce themselves.
The patient farmer may water and weed
for myriad days without a sign.
It is just this way when you plant the Word.

Planting the Word is never enough.
You cannot plant and walk away.
While the Word and Faith produce themselves,
our work goes on to the wakening day.

Be patient, be strong: Do not lose heart.
Wait for the rains, early and late.
We are God's servants, working together.
Let us rejoice on the harvest date.

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

1 Samuel 17:32-49

David said to Saul, 'Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.' But David said to Saul, 'Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.' David said, 'The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.' So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the LORD be with you!'

Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, 'I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.' So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.' But David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's and he will give you into our hand.'

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

June 20, 2021 | 1 Samuel 17:32-49

David

I am David. I kept the sheep on my father's land.
My role in the family was to guard his flock of sheep
near Bethlehem for long hours and with little sleep
and keep the sheep safe from bears and lions.
Because the Lord was with me, I had no fear
when they attacked. I was able to strike down
and kill these beasts. Why should I fear a man?
The God of the armies of Israel is always near.

I am set for single combat with mighty Goliath
armed only with a sling and five smooth stones,
but the Philistine champion is outnumbered two to one
as the Lord protects me from the giant's wrath.
With God's help, I shall aim for brittle bone
and bring him low with a perfectly cast stone.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.

David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. (He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said:

Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places!
How the mighty have fallen!
Tell it not in Gath,
proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon;
or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice,
the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult.

You mountains of Gilboa,
let there be no dew or rain upon you,
nor bounteous fields!
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,
the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more.

From the blood of the slain,
from the fat of the mighty,
the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
nor the sword of Saul return empty.

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and in death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions.

O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
who clothed you with crimson, in luxury,
who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

How the mighty have fallen
in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
greatly beloved were you to me;
your love to me was wonderful,
passing the love of women.

How the mighty have fallen,
and the weapons of war perished!

June 27, 2021 | 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

Sacralized Violence

Look down on the Great Plain of Esdraelon
from the hilltop at Nazareth. History is written in blood.
Deborah and Barak routed the kings of Canaan

at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo. The torrent Kishon
purged the Canaanites. Josiah was slain by the forces
of Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo. Saul and his sons

were decapitated after battle with the Philistines.
At Jezreel, Jehu killed Jehoram and Ahaziah
and, following that, he slaughtered all their men

and all the prophets of Baal. Then he turned
to Jezebel. He ordered his men to throw her
to her death from the palace window where she was eaten

by ravenous dogs. But Jehu wasn't done!
He hunted down and killed all the royal princes
and had their heads displayed at his command.

Jehu invited the worshippers of Baal to come
to a ceremony, then trapped and murdered them all.
He converted the Temple of Baal into a latrine.

Thousands of ordinary men were killed or maimed
because ambitious kings invoked the deity.
The arms of the survivors were weary from all the decapitations.

Kishon means river of slaughter and dismemberment.
The Plain of Esdraelon is a place of tragedy and war.
The oldest scriptures record such sacralized violence
by men. To credit God is the brief of the nihilist.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Mark 6:1-13

He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

July 4, 2021 | Mark 6:1-13

Is Not This the Carpenter?

God does not necessarily choose the qualified.
He qualifies the chosen. The people of the village asked,
“Is not this the carpenter?” as if the past
of the humble homeboy Jesus of Nazareth proscribed
his mission to be a rabbi with followers in tow.
Their question to him, “Aren’t you the son of Mary,”
was another way of taunting, “Who’s your daddy?”
They wanted to know: *Who do you think you are?*

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

2 Samuel 11:1-15

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'

So David sent word to Joab, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house, and wash your feet.' Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, 'Uriah did not go down to his house', David said to Uriah, 'You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?' Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.' Then David said to Uriah, 'Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.'

July 25, 2021 | 2 Samuel 11:1-15

Spring

In the spring of the year,
kings go out to battle.
Summers are too hot
and no one likes to fight
in the ice and rain.
Good weather
is the best time for killing
don't you agree?

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Ephesians 4:25–5:2

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our s, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

August 8, 2021 | Ephesians 4:25–5:2

Anger

Mother wakes up
disoriented
until she visualizes
the face
of her enemy

again
I make a list
of slights and snubs
by those
now dead

events gone awry
in the faraway past
linger
like cat urine
on an old rug

tonight
she climbs inside herself
and shuts the lid
your session has ended;
try again later

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned for seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.'

August 15, 2021 | 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

Wisdom

Ask what I should give you. As the king,
Solomon could have asked for anything—
wealth, fame, palatial splendors,
death to all the royal pretenders.
He looked beyond the trappings of court,
and asked instead for a listening heart
and an understanding mind. For the people of Israel,
he wanted to know good from evil.
The Lord puts this question to everyone.
When queried, how will you respond?

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. He said, 'O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, "There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me." Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Have regard to your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day towards this house, the place of which you said, "My name shall be there", that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays towards this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling-place; heed and forgive.

'Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name—for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays towards this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling-place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built.

August 22, 2021 | 1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43

The Ark of the Covenant

In the red morning on the umber sea,
none of the tall ships, wind or lee,
is lovelier than you, proud lady.
O, wandering bark, come home to me!

The storm is passed. Sailors rest.
The People are safe, no longer oppressed.
The Lord is calling: Be my guest.
You are the chosen. You are the blessed.

The throne of God is in this space.
The Holy of Holies is now in place.
From tent to temple, the race is over.
You are safe at last in Yahweh's grace.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

The voice of my beloved!
Look, he comes,
leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
Look, there he stands
behind our wall,
gazing in at the windows,
looking through the lattice.
My beloved speaks and says to me:
'Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;
for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtle-dove
is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.
Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.

August 29, 2021 | Song of Solomon 2:8-13

Arise, My Love

Let's be honest. The moon does not think
of itself as an agent of love, nor the tower
a phallus. They are what they are and nothing more.
The lovers in the Song of Songs are not actors
in allegories of Israel and God or Christ and the church
in the mind of the randy poet who wrote the lines.
Theologians of temple and church ignore signs
so obvious: the absolute joy of monogamous sex.

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Mark 9:30-37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

September 19, 2021 | Mark 9:30-37

He Called a Little Child

When little children play their games,
they mix the brown, the black, and the white.
Foreign accents and alien speech
are muted by squeals of pure delight.

The little children aren't wise enough
to tell the girls apart from boys.
They greet their playmates with open hearts.
Without guile, they share their toys.

The little children do not compete.
In time, they'll learn to lose and win.
Knowing nothing of money and fame,
they look to parents for everything.

As a little child depends on parents,
we must be humble and trust in God.
Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
The very opposite of the way of the world!

Jesus called a little child.
He set the child among the crowd.
How can a person enter the kingdom?
You must unlearn the way of the proud.

Give up your claims to power and status.
Become a child once again.
Unless you change and be like children,
you cannot gain the kingdom of heaven.

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Hebrews 4:12-16

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

October 10, 2021 | Hebrews 4:12-16

On the Bridge

The word of the Lord is an oscillating dialog
of course-corrections from the officer of the deck to the helmsman
as the helmsman utters “Aye,” repeats the command,
and turns the helm and tiller to the new heading.

Except the *word* is a quiet voice within
and not a person bellowing over the main.
Brothers and sisters, it connects God with man—
a constant conversation for those who choose to listen.

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They replied, 'We are able.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.'

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

October 17, 2021 | Mark 10:35-45

The Ballad of Constituency Service

Joshua declared his run for office.
He hired James and John
to craft a compelling media message
and manage a clean campaign.

James and John planned their game
to star on Joshua's team,
to get themselves rank and fame
by building Joshua's dream.

On the day the boss won election,
the two hatched a scheme.
Now was the time to raise the option:
to manage the political team

and stand with him on his left and right.
Joshua had a hunch
they really wanted the media lights
and the three-martini lunch.

Joshua said: "I have plans for you.
I cannot grant your ask.
Instead," he said, "I am giving you
the most important task.

Constituency service is the top of the list
of all Congressional affairs
and you are the best equipped to assist
those with urgent cares."

James and John earned preferment—
they got what they deserved.
Redemption comes from being a servant
and not from being served.

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Ruth 1:1-18

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had had consideration for his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.' Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.' But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.' Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' But Ruth said,
'Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May the LORD do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!'
When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

October 31, 2021 | Ruth 1:1-18

The Grafting of a Nation

When we graft the tissues of plants,
they continue to grow as one.
The lower part is the stock;
the upper part, the scion.

If the grower does it right,
the new improves the old.
The aging stock revives.
A spurt of life takes hold.

Strangers come to our shore.
They worry if they belong.
Our nation is grafting, too.
Are we doing it right or wrong?

Parents work to the bone
so their children are free from fears.
It's always been this way—
for four hundred years.

When we graft the tissues of people,
they continue to grow as one.
It's up to us to perfect
the grafting of stock and scion.

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.' She said to her, 'All that you tell me I will do.'

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.' Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the hood gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.' They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

November 7, 2021 | Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17

Imago Dei

When the kinsman of Boaz learned he had to take Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth as part of the deal for the land once belonging to Elimelech, he balked. "I will have nothing to do with her," he hissed with scorn. Boaz asked, "Why?" "Moabites do not belong in Judah." Boaz was not displeased to hear these words. He desired the land and Ruth for himself.

But Boaz braced his kinsman in front of the elders with a quote from scripture: "*God created mankind in his own image; male and female he created them.* Who are you to say a woman of Moab is different from you and me? Unlike the animals, each person on earth resembles God, with reason and moral choices. You cannot claim to love God and despise a child of God."

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Year B

2 Samuel 23:1-7

Now these are the last words of David:
The oracle of David, son of Jesse,
the oracle of the man whom God exalted,
the anointed of the God of Jacob,
the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

The spirit of the LORD speaks through me,
his word is upon my tongue.
The God of Israel has spoken,
the Rock of Israel has said to me:
One who rules over people justly,
ruling in the fear of God,
is like the light of morning,
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

Is not my house like this with God?
For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,
ordered in all things and secure.
Will he not cause to prosper
all my help and my desire?
But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away;
for they cannot be picked up with the hand;
to touch them one uses an iron bar
or the shaft of a spear.
And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.

November 21, 2021 | 2 Samuel 23:1-7

[tanka]

old friends part:
they promise to meet again
some day...
each knows
this is the last time

Last Sunday after Pentecost, Christ the King: Year B

Romans 15:4-13

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

'Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name';
and again he says,
'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people';
and again,
'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him';
and again Isaiah says,
'The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope.'

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

December 4, 2022 | Romans 15:4-13

Our Corporate Wholeness

Two things.
I have a connection
with every other person in the world.
My belief in that connection
is constantly tested and severed.

Perfectionism is a lie.
What if the quarterback has a perfect passer rating,
but his team loses?
How does he feel?
What if the gymnast scores a 10.0
in every event,
but her team loses?
How does she feel?

As for me,
I participate in the wholeness of the human family,
and that is holiness!
It is not my private holiness.
It is our connection together.

All of us as one seek
an active corporate and communal image
of what is happening.
I cannot carry
such glory and greatness
by myself.
And neither can I bear
such universal suffering and sadness.

Second Sunday of Advent, Year A

Psalm 80

To the leader: on Lilies, a Covenant. Of Asaph. A Psalm.

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O LORD God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.
But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.

December 18, 2022 | Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

Turning the Blank Pages

It was all good for the first three and a half minutes.
He led the orchestral intro from the bench,
waving his arms and bobbing his head
while I turned the pages.
No one was paying attention to me.
Then the orchestra fell silent.
Hr. v. B. launched into his solo part
and I swung open the next page...to nothing.
It was page after blank page
with just the occasional hieroglyphic note
that meant something to him
but nothing to me.

I panicked.
How was I to know
when one blank page ended
and another blank page began?
He took delight in my troubles,
but was kind enough to give me
a surreptitious nod
whenever we came to the end of emptiness.

The concert was a success.
No man was a better friend than Beethoven
when he was in a jolly mood.
I cherish the memory of his howls of laughter
at our convivial dinner after the concert!

Time brings an end to all living things.
Beethoven is gone now.
My own health is fragile.
That night in Vienna when I turned pages
for a generational genius—
unsure of what was coming next,

(Continues next page)

but surrounded by music most sublime
and encouraged by his bemused glance
at just the right moments—
was a key life lesson.
When we wake up in the morning
or start a new year,
we don't have a score to follow.
We put our trust in the Master at the keyboard
giving us celestial music and surreptitious nods
as we turn the blank pages of our lives.

Hr. v. B. = Herr van Beethoven

NOTE: Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 was first performed on April 5, 1803. Ignaz von Seyfried was Beethoven's page turner.

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A

Luke 2:1-14

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'

December 25, 2022 | Luke 2:1-14

We All Start at Zero

The practiced hands of the good-humored doctor
pull the infant out of the warm duskiness
of an amniotic ocean into the unfamiliar glare
of delivery room lights. It is a rough business,
coming into the world, but every person
in the room is pulling for the startled new arrival
to survive, grow, thrive, and come of age.

In this instant, we align ourselves with God
to affirm the wholesome generative forces of the world.
We all start at zero. Look at the face
of the newborn child. Where is the theological construct
of original sin? Do you see it? No?
The swaddled baby is laid on the mother's chest
and begins to learn the ambivalent ways of humankind.

Christmas Day, Year A

Ephesians 3:1-12

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given to me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given to me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

January 6, 2023 | Ephesians 3:1-12

Open My Mind

Open my mind to the stranger who differs from me.
Empty my mind, O Lord, of ignorance and fear.
Allow me to live in a world where knowledge is free.
Give me a mind, O Lord, that is always clear.

Open my mind to the stranger of another race.
Let me see him as a friend and not the other.
Allow him to be the gracious guest in my space.
As host, I am pleased to do my best for a brother.

Empty my mind, O Lord, of conventional bias.
Open my mind to the norm of unconventional love.
Give me the courage to resist the spitefully pious.
Allow me to assert that love is simply love.

Open my mind to the stranger from a foreign land.
Let me share the warmth of our country's sun.
If he wants to be my neighbor, I'll lend a hand.
Our nation's motto is "Out of many, one."

Give me the strength, O Lord, not to wait
for a thousand tomorrows to live in brotherly love.
Empty my mind, O Lord, of the ruin of hate.
Open my mind, O Lord, to the rule of love.

The Epiphany, Year A

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

For 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. For it is written,
'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'

January 29, 2023 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Ontological Argument

Assuming that God's existence
might be proved through logic,
would you and I believe
in such an elegant God?

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

Matthew 5:13-20

'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

February 5, 2023 | Matthew 5:13-20

For the Faces I Will Never See

Long stretches of handling the hooks*
with rhythmic certainty
seamlessly moving forward on a row
occasionally looking up at a movie
seen before many times
(knowing which scene is coming)
sometimes losing track
of the sequencing cadence
or noticing the row does not look right,
counting, counting, ripping out,
saying a word not safe for work,
re-reading instructions
then back on track,
finishing the main pattern
and refining the border—
the final step—until
done at last!

For the faces I will never see,
you bundled newborns in other arms,
my love goes out to you.
I imagine my yarn
chucked against your chin,
but that is where my story ends.
Wear it well
and pay it forward
for children of your own
if you can.

*Crochet

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, 'I belong to Paul', and another, 'I belong to Apollos', are you not merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

February 12, 2023 | 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

The Growth of St. John's Church

The first to speak is the garden soil.
Our hopes depend on fertile land.
Without the soil, we cannot grow.

Land alone is bereft of life.
What we need is healthy seed.
Without the seed, we cannot grow.

Soil and seed are well and good,
but absent rain what's our gain?
Without the rain, we cannot grow.

The genial sun laughs out loud.
Garden delight depends on light.
Without the sun, we cannot grow.

Surrender your ego for the common good.
Work as one to get it done.
The Holy Spirit gives the growth.

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year A

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—
a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
 a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
 nor will be again after them
 in ages to come.

Yet even now, says the LORD,
 return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
 rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the LORD, your God,
 for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
 and relents from punishing.
Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
 and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain-offering and a drink-offering
 for the LORD, your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
 gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
 assemble the aged;
gather the children,
 even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
 and the bride her canopy.

Between the vestibule and the altar
 let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.
Let them say, 'Spare your people, O LORD,
 and do not make your heritage a mockery,
 a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
 "Where is their God?" '

February 22, 2023 | Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

The Politics of No

No, we are not bewhiskered woodsmen posing
with a fabled misery whip 12-feet long
emerging from the sepia history of real men

or frugal, gaunt survivalists riding out
the Great Depression or the khaki war machine
fighting to the death against the Axis powers

or fearless astronauts landing on the moon.
As the swaggering first citizens of a unipolar world,
we are soft from indolent years of privileged ease.

We are soft without a great enemy to fight
so we look within and fight among ourselves.
We harden into corpulence and intellectual sloth

as nimbler nations strive to take us down,
not by the savagery of war, but with whispered lies
designed to divide us into two contending camps

dueling to the death of the great American experiment
of broad-shouldered accomplishment of big things.
No, my friend, we are not that nation anymore.

Ash Wednesday, Year A

Romans 5:12-19

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

February 26, 2023 | Romans 5:12-19

The Power of Myth and Metaphor

Death does not hinge on human sin.
Literally.
Paul knows this.

Death and extinction long preceded
the arrival of humans and their sins.
Paul's audience in the Roman church knows this.

Evolutionary biology is beside the point.
Paul creates a poetic paradigm
to make a point about faith.

His model has an elegant design—
a thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.
The “first man” Adam has life,

but disobedience leads to death
for himself, for Eve,
for all humankind.

God counters this
with an equal but opposite solution.
The powerful obedience of Jesus

(his faithful death on the cross)
enables the faithful to cancel out
the deadly destiny of sin

and have a new identity and destiny
of righteousness and life
through Jesus Christ.

First Sunday in Lent, Year A

John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

'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.

March 5, 2023 | John 3:1-17

Wind Over the Lake

*The wind blows where it chooses,
and you hear the sound of it,
but you do not know where it comes from
or where it goes.*

John 3:8

Wind over the lake—desiccate leaves
scrape indolently at our feet, like the years.
We feel the chill of the restless wind.

Fall's maelstrom of reds and golds
is all around. The cool, invisible hand
lifts silvering hair.

We are entering autumn of our time together.
Some leaves have fallen, but many remain,
waiting to be plucked by wind over the lake.

Second Sunday in Lent, Year A

John 4:5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice

together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labor.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.'

March 12, 2023 | John 4:5-42

On the Liberty of Women

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot
change, courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.*

~ Reinhold Niebuhr ~

Who makes the rules for things we cannot change?
We'll decide which rules to ignore or keep.

We won't accept the things we cannot change.
It's time to change the things we cannot accept.

God, grant to us the wisdom to know the course
you set for us—and not the course by others.

God, grant to us the courage to be the force
to overturn the rules prescribed by brothers.

We won't accept the things we cannot change.
It's time to change the things we can't accept.

Third Sunday in Lent, Year A

Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death—
 even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
 and gave him the name
 that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
 every knee should bend,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

April 2, 2023 | Philippians 2:5-11

The Swans of Skagit Valley

To the human eye,
the cornfield empties itself of value
for the rest of the year.

Ragged rows of stubble
stretch to the fog-bleared tree line.

Large puddles of freezing rainwater
and patches of old snow
punctuate the dun-horse devastation.

The autumn crop is obedient
to the point of death.

Tranquility is shattered
by a rising crescendo of trumpeter swans
haggling over their landing spots.

Gleaners from the far north fill their bellies
with the final treasures of the field,
then rise in unison to the heavens,
each as heavy as a small suitcase at Sea-Tac,
necks fully extended,
bleating furiously,
as they bolt for the breeding grounds.

Palm Sunday, Year A

Jeremiah 31:1-6

At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.

Thus says the LORD:

The people who survived the sword

found grace in the wilderness;

when Israel sought for rest,

the LORD appeared to him from far away.

I have loved you with an everlasting love;

therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

Again I will build you, and you shall be built,

O virgin Israel!

Again you shall take your tambourines,

and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers.

Again you shall plant vineyards

on the mountains of Samaria;

the planters shall plant,

and shall enjoy the fruit.

For there shall be a day when sentinels will call

in the hill country of Ephraim:

'Come, let us go up to Zion,

to the LORD our God.'

April 9, 2023 | Jeremiah 31:1-6

Camp Loowit Alumni

The loveliest things are incredibly brief.
The loveliest things happen only once.
Years compress to minutes.
Nature does not care about your feelings.
Eight months after the 50-year reunion
of Y campers at Spirit Lake,
Mount St. Helens blew apart
and ruined the pristine lake forever.
It buried the YMCA camp
under hundreds of feet of timber and tephra.
Because of debris, the bottom of the new lake
is higher than the surface of the old lake.
The breathtaking symmetry of the iconic mountain,
proudly emblazoned on thousands of postcards,
is reduced to a pile of charcoal gray.

The Camp Loowit alumni
don't meet in person any more.
They gather on Facebook.
Most discuss the loveliest hours of youth.
But there are some who celebrate
via the sideways scrolling of photographs
the green transformation of the blast site
and the return of animal life,
and though the site is different,
much different, from what it was before,
a new kind of beauty awaits those
who embrace the words of the prophet,

*Again I will build you,
and you shall be built,
O virgin Israel!*

Easter Sunday, Year A

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

'You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him,

"I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover, my flesh will live in hope.
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One experience corruption.
You have made known to me the ways of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence."

'Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

"He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption."
This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

April 16, 2023 | Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Low Sunday

Low Sunday is the Sunday after Easter
when we cheered the Lord's ascendance.
The low is not for “low church.”
It's about the small attendance.

Second Sunday of Easter, Year A

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.' And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

April 23, 2023 | Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Metanoia

Don't look back in sorrow
at the wrongs you did to others
or the wrong beliefs you held.
Sorrow is not the ask
of Jesus or John the Baptist.
Nothing you say or do

will change what you said or did,
don't you see? Peter paused
to let that sink in.
Instead, he said, reorient yourself
to a new way of life, starting today,
with baptism in the name of Jesus

and acceptance of the Holy Spirit.
Some in the crowd turned away
from Peter's altar call,
but three thousand came forward
and took on their new identities
as the People of the Way.

Third Sunday of Easter, Year A

1 Peter 2:2-10

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'
To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
'The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner',

and

'A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.'

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

May 7, 2023 | 1 Peter 2:2-10

The Living Stone

The temple was not built with living stone.
Nothing made by human hands can last
forever. The second temple's time has passed
after more than half a millennium, as you can see.
The Israelites built it; the Romans tore it down.

Come to him, the living stone, and be a living stone
yourself—in a spiritual house for all eternity.

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A

Acts 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said,

"For we too are his offspring."

Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'

May 14, 2023 | Acts 17:22-31

Paul at the Areopagus

inside
the stone diety
stone

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

May 21, 2023 | 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

The Theology of Suffering

Words cannot explain suffering.
Don't waste your time with "Why me?"
Of the myriad sufferings in the world,

choose one:
the suffering of Jesus.
Then get to work.

You will be glad and shout for joy.
Be grateful you still have agency
for Gospel action.

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year A

Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, 'My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.' And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.' Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' The LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?" Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.' But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'

The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' And she said, 'Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'

June 18, 2023 | Genesis 18:1-15 (21:1-7)

The Birth of Laughter

Infertility is hereditary.

If your parents didn't have kids,
neither will you.

This was not a laughing matter
to the old man Abraham
and the old woman Sarah

who tried for years without success
to have a child.

God promised Abraham he would be
the ancestor of a great nation,
but the line dies with infertility.
Abraham and Sarah were astonished

when the three mysterious visitors
informed the wizened Abraham
that he and Sarah would finally have a son.
Abraham laughed,
Sarah laughed,
and God smiled at the absurdity.

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

2 Peter 1:13-21

I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

August 6, 2023 | 2 Peter 1:13-21

Saint Peter Foresees His Death

the blacktop road
comes to an end here
at the edge
of the wilderness...
be not afraid

Bonus poem about the Transfiguration:

Chapel of the Transfiguration

The first thing I saw was the constellation of houseflies
on the Chapel of the Transfiguration window blocking the grandeur
of the Cathedral Group with Grand Teton in the center.
The fly was the filthiest of creatures to my fastidious eye.
I was offended at first: the sacred was marred by the profane.
so I stepped outside the log church to see
the majesty of the mountains beneath the blue canopy
without the pious interference of human hands.

That was sixty-two years ago. I've had a rethink.
God is not captured, domesticated, and confined
to churches, but is alive in every created thing.
Without a nature-based spirituality, the word profane
means *outside the temple*. Are we fish looking for water?
And why do we argue about who owns the water?

The Transfiguration, Year A

Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

August 27, 2023 | Matthew 16:13-20

Why Caesarea Philippi?

What better place to ask the question—
Who do you say that I am?—
than the well-traveled intersection
for politics, religion, and trade,
Caesarea Philippi.

Armies are tramping through all the time
and it's the trade route between Damascus and Tyre
and there are shrines to the old pagan gods.
All these concerns come together here
at this familiar crossroads.

So, when Jesus pops the question,
his followers might be tempted
to think he represents an earthly endeavor:
material wealth, military power,
or prominence in the religious establishment.

For Simon Peter, son of Jonah,
flesh and blood did not reveal the answer,
but our Father in heaven.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Psalm 149

Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.
Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.
Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.
For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the poor with victory.
Let the faithful exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their couches.
Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,
to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,
to bind their kings with fetters
and their nobles with chains of iron,
to execute on them the judgement decreed.
This is glory for all his faithful ones.
Praise the LORD!

September 10, 2023 | Psalm 149

Adorning the Poor With Victory

What happens after the Lord
wreaks vengeance on the nations?

What happens after the Lord
binds the kings in chains
and their nobles with links of iron?

What happens after the Lord
inflicts on them the judgment decreed?

What does it mean to adorn the poor with victory?

What happens to the poor after the glory of conquest
is showered on all the faithful people?

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Philippians 2:1-13

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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

October 1, 2023 | Philippians 2:1-13

Therefore, My Beloved

My glass is filled
with dusk tonight...
I swirl the west and think of you
and sip the stars
down to the stem.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Psalm 19

To the leader. A Psalm of David.
The heavens are telling the glory of God;
 and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
 and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
 their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
 and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
 and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
 and its circuit to the end of them;
 and nothing is hidden from its heat.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
 reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure,
 making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
 rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear,
 enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is pure,
 enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true
 and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
 even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
 and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is your servant warned;
 in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can detect their errors?
 Clear me from hidden faults.
Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
 do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
 and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
 be acceptable to you,
 O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

October 8, 2023 | Psalm 19

Memory

*One day tells its tale to another,
and one night imparts knowledge to another.
Although they have no words or language,
and their voices are not heard,
their sound has gone out into all lands,
and their message to the ends of the world.*

Psalm 19:2-4

In the beginning, the memory barely fits
a Times Square video screen.
In the end, the image is wallet sized.

In addition, there is an altered state:
the uncarved block becomes a sculpture;
the portrait of a lady becomes a smile.

In the beginning, myriad details cling
to the core event. Incessant winds
of the mind erode the loose periphery

and one by one, over a long life,
the less essential falls away
into forgetfulness. In the end,

the stripped-down core event—
some instance of love, triumph or shame—
remains intact forever.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

October 22, 2023 | 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Macedonia and Achaia

Looking out over the caramel landscape,
the least of the apostles announced,
Upon this blade of grass, I build my church.

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Matthew 22:34-46

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, ' "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: 'What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?' They said to him, 'The son of David.' He said to them, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

"The Lord said to my Lord,
'Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet' "?

If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?' No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

October 29, 2023 | Matthew 22:34-46

Pilgrim

Come home, come home to the simple life:
Love God with all your heart,
with all your soul and with all your strength.
This is the first and greatest rule.

Come home, come home to the holy life:
Love your neighbor as yourself.
These two rules are all you need.
Everything else is explanation.

Come, pilgrim, come home to God.
Clear your mind of the cares of the world.
It does not matter how far you roam.
The road from home is the road to home.

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Joshua 3:7-17

The LORD said to Joshua, 'This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, "When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan." ' Joshua then said to the Israelites, 'Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God.' Joshua said, 'By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap.'

When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing towards the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

November 5, 2023 | Joshua 3:7-17

The Big Nothing

What happens to the indigenous peoples
living in someone else's promised land?
We never know because they are slaughtered

or erased forever as a culture.

*Nothing to see here—
their story is a big nothing.*

Historians connect the dots of known events
across white silences of ruined chronicles
forever mute.

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Judges 4:1-7

The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died. So the LORD sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly for twenty years.

At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgement. She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, 'The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, "Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand." '

November 19, 2023 | Judges 4:1-7

Wars in My Lifetime

World War II

a boy-soldier lies
with his face
on the continent of Europe
and his feet
in the Atlantic

Korea

when we died,
they said casualties were low;
they gave us medals
and thanked us
for our service

Vietnam

I am an American fighting man
no visible foe
no battle lines
no inner hate
no reason why

Desert Storm

no longer
forward-leaning warfighters,
the wounded
are deleted
from the present tense

Iraq

Iraq War,
my, how you have grown...
look at you:
such a big boy
and so strong!

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Epilogue

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Come Together

Come together, people of faith,
from the farthest corners of the earth,
from faith traditions round the world—
come together to honor the worth
of every person from birth to death.

Come together, come together!

For you without your daily bread
who sleeps with stars overhead,
we offer hope—be not afraid.
A better future lies ahead;
people of faith are by your side.

Come together, come together!

People of faith call for justice
in politics, law, the marketplace
where greed and malice are commonplace.
People of faith will never allow
that every person has a price.

Come together, come together!

Come together, people of faith,
from the farthest corners of the earth,
from faith traditions round the world.
Unity of faith is a force for good;
universal tenets are understood.

Come together, come together!