

This Is Us

Traveling the Redemption Road



2019
Lenten
Devotional

*Foundry United
Methodist Church*

See You On The Road

*God leads me in right paths
for God's name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil for you are with me...*
Psalm 23:3-4 NIV

Anthony and I love to hike. For our 15th wedding anniversary, we traveled to Italy and hiked from Siena to Florence—70 miles across Tuscany! Before you become overly impressed with our stamina, let me clarify: it was just the two of us, our daypacks, and a trail map for each day's 10-14 mile hike. Each evening, we arrived at our B&B in the next village with good Italian food and drink—and with our luggage, transported by the tour company—awaiting us. Trust me, that's the way to do a cross-country hike! Last year, we did the same thing in England, to celebrate our 20th anniversary.

I enjoy being alone in a big landscape, exploring scenic and pristine trails, glimpsing things rarely seen from the highway. I've also learned that there are stretches of such journeys not so pleasant. Sometimes getting from point A to B requires traversing a smelly back alley. Or the trail is nearly impassable due to mud or erosion. Sometimes the way is rocky and steep. There are times when, no matter which way you rotate it, the map simply doesn't match up with the ground beneath you. The Lenten journey stretches out before us. There will be beauty and wonder. There will also be moments when we must walk through challenging places—confronting our limits and brokenness and the painful realities of our world. But we do not travel alone. Our Foundry community—represented so beautifully in this devotional—journeys with us. And God never leaves our side.

See you on the road.

Senior Pastor Ginger Gaines-Cirelli

Blessed

My family's Chevy Impala sailed across the desert in August 1970 into southern California. We were moving west to an LA suburb where I would experience critical years of formation in faith and in understanding how I was connected to others. As young evangelicals, we were taught to see the world as us/them. But southern California taught me that life wasn't quite so simple.

I was blessed: a religious kid whose most loyal friend in grade school was from an atheist family.

I was blessed: a white kid whose study buddy was from Hong Kong.

I was blessed: the well-behaved kid, whose sixth grade teacher invited to befriend the boy who always got into trouble. His name was Sean, and that powerful friendship taught me that compulsive and self-destructive behaviors are no measure of a person's heart.

I was blessed: the absolute worst player on my seventh grade basketball team was given respect by the best player, who defended me to the others and taught me all about grace.

I was blessed: once I threw my conscience to the wind and taunted another boy, only to be reprimanded by Jack. I once invited Jack to church hoping that he might be saved. Un-churched Jack helped to save me—what gracious irony!

In college, I split majors between religion (hanging out with soon-to-be clergy) and philosophy (hanging out with iconoclasts). I learned I needed yin and yang in my life.

Fast-forward to 2019. No surprise that I would find my way to a place like Foundry, or that I would write a book on multi-cultural team building—how we come together with very different stories.

Our stories form us. But I did not choose my story—on that point, I am very clear. It chose me when my parents decided to turn the Chevrolet west toward LA.

I am blessed.

Paul Nixon

Lilac Orchid

“Faith comes and goes. It rises and falls like the tides of an invisible ocean. It is presumptuous to think that faith will stay with you forever, it is just as presumptuous to think that unbelief will.”

—Flannery O’Connor

I have three orchid plants. All were unexpected gifts at different times from my former student, Alicia, and my friend, Jane. They flowered beautifully when I first received them, but then one by one, each of their blossoms withered and died. Every week I faithfully watered them. The lilac orchid re-bloomed for a while and then gradually lost its blossoms again. The others appeared dormant.

Then one day, I noticed slight bulges along the stem of the the lilac orchid, and just as the first blossom seemed ready to burst, I noticed some bulges along the stem of the white orchid. The baby orchid was the oldest and appeared sickly, but one day some swollen nodes appeared. Now as I sit writing this, all three of my orchids fill our apartment with color.

Some unseen mysterious force had been working all the time with my orchids like the “random jiggling” Pastor Ginger referred to in a recent sermon. So it is with our faith.

At times God seems far away and the world appears hostile. Foundry Church and its caring provides the watering of my soul, nurturing those unseen forces. It does this with the inspiration of the spoken word and stirring music, the stories of its members working on behalf of those who have not been given “a fair shake” by society. It has wrapped Hal and me in prayer as he struggles with pain just as we pray for others. All this encourages me as I mentor and seek to receive and express God’s love here in Gaithersburg.

Janet Garman

Three Ears

I had assumed my ears were pretty sufficient as body parts go. They registered for years sounds of our Dupont neighborhood, like playful doggie park yelps and the alluring Foundry tower bells.

Those bells eventually led me to a few worship services and unexpectedly, to work on Foundry's staff. Over time the effect of receiving Foundry's sincere hospitality began to alert a "spiritual something" in me that had been dormant for eons. This personal reaction was becoming more audible on a very intimate, intrinsic level. It is a challenge to describe this to you with precision. But I can say it was a type of holy welcome, gaining volume from somewhere inside.

One intense work day at Foundry's office, I was rushing to a meeting. A voice from far within said: "*You know I am real*". My pace slowed down. Again that internal (but not from me) voice said: "*You know I am real*".

In those seconds, my baffled soul learned that two functioning ears were not the only means to listen. I realized how I had neglected for years my heart's capacity to hear God. That particular moment was life-changing and humbling beyond measure. But it is never too late for redemption.

Prayer:

Thank you Jesus for your immense patience while teaching us to recognize the sound of your love. It was, and is, a quenching relief to worship you at this church...and hear again and again your saving grace together. Amen.

Jill M. Foster

Digesting Anxiety

*But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body,
every one of them, just as God wanted them to be.*

1 Corinthians 12:18 NIV

In 2017, I was diagnosed with a generalized anxiety disorder, which has subsequently involved some mild stomach problems. It turns out my stress level was impacting my digestion. It's a common phenomenon, as I am told by my doctor. So when someone recently asked me what part of the "body" of Foundry I most identified with, my mind immediately went to—ironically—the stomach. Perhaps this is because I find myself reacting to, rather than processing, the stresses around me. And the last few years of my life have been about "digesting" my surroundings and trying to find my place and my voice.

Sometimes, anxiety wins.

I constantly worry if I will have enough time, energy, and resources to carry out Foundry's tall order to "love God, love each other, and change the world." It makes me uncomfortable. What if I don't have enough time to serve? Or money to give? Or energy to love? But Foundry accepts my doubts, insufficiency, and insecurities.

Take, for example, the first Sunday I attended the Practicing Spirituality Sunday School class. I cried. I blubbered to a classroom full of adult strangers about being diagnosed with anxiety and feeling constantly anxious and overwhelmed. And then they invited me to come back the next week. They learned my name. Nowadays, my classmates always hug me when they see me. They ask me how I am. They make me feel like I am valuable and help me realize that I—the stomach, the digester, the worrier —am ENOUGH. That I am part of the body, just as God intended.

Hannah-Alise Rogers

On the Spiritual Implications of *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up*

So I drank the #KonMari Kool-Aid. I read the book and am a devotee of Marie Kondo's Netflix "reality" series. Chances are someone you know is a Kondo disciple too, since according to Goodwill, our area's donation of goods to the charity has increased by 42% since January 1 when the series started.

Something is sticking, and I think it is spiritual. I think Marie Kondo is a bonafide mystic. Kondo introduced me to a profound re-imagining of some ancient spiritual practices. Her (sometimes infuriating) method is also her magic: Pile your belongings together by category. Hold each item in your hands. See how you feel. Ask, "Does this spark joy?"

It is hard to trust that the coming joy from shedding possessions will provide sufficiently for my needs. Yet, my journey through my material belongings was personally transformative. I couldn't help but see the parallels with how Jesuit theologian Walter Burghardt describes contemplation as "a long, loving look at the real." Once more physical space in my life opened, I discovered an interior longing for more prayer and contemplation.

Tidying up reveals the spiritual weight of our material lives. While discerning my possessions, I began to see that separating the spiritual from the material is to deny the mystery of the incarnation. Christ's incarnation and, amazingly, his resurrection, took place in our material world. Jesus helps us to see clearly that which is deeply real.

Prayer:

During Lent, Lord, remind us that to enter into the joy of the resurrection of our savior, it helps to take a long, loving look at our attachments. Help us to release what may hold us back from participating in the impending celebration.

Amanda Munroe

Seen

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

John 8:12 NRSV

The day had been difficult. I was carrying the grief of losing a close friend, work had been full of stress, and I was feeling overwhelmed by my first semester in seminary. While taking the Metro home from work, I felt especially constricted and increasingly impatient. I got off the train for some fresh air and walked the rest of the way home. I felt invisible and alone as I made my way up Connecticut Avenue toward Dupont Circle. My anxiety must have been written on my face because as I continued my walk, a man sitting on the sidewalk looked up at me and said, “Hey, where’s your smile?”

I was seen.

Immediately, the weight of my day began to melt. I thanked the man and quickly turned away, tears welling up in my eyes. After a couple blocks, I made it to Dupont Circle, sat on a bench, and wept. The man I had just encountered was a ray of light in my life; he had pierced through the darkness of my day. While many looked down at him, he still looked up and saw me.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world. As Christ’s light illuminates the path set before us, we are invited to see those we encounter along the way with love. One does not need eyes to see; one only needs an open heart. And as we align ourselves with Christ, Christ’s light shines through us. It’s on us to see each other. We may never know just how we are brightening someone else’s day.

Prayer:

God of Eternal Light, illuminate our hearts so that we might see others for who they are, as your beloved and sacred creation. Amen.

Chet Jechura

#HimToo

The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.

1 Timothy 5:24 NIV

It happened to me when I was 17 years old. One of my high school teachers took liberties. We were alone at the time. I was speechless. Later, in the confined space of my head I was shouting, “What do I do?” I did not tell my best friend who, for 12 years, had been the person I turned to when I felt I was in over my head. I did not tell my parents because I was concerned that things might get out of hand too quickly if they came to my defense. I did not tell school administrators knowing I would have an emotional meltdown when questioning began.

My solution? Bury it, deeper each day, until it was barely there. When I was 39-years old, it popped up out of nowhere during a session with a psychotherapist. The therapist encouraged me to confront the perpetrator and state as clearly as possible how the experience had made me feel. That seemed unlikely to happen because that teacher lived hundreds of miles from me. And then my twenty-fifth high school class reunion was announced!

When I learned the teacher had accepted the invitation to attend, I began preparing. I found the ideal moment during the banquet when the two of us were at a distance from others. I spoke my peace. The teacher listened, looked me in the eye, and denied everything. I was speechless, again, just as I had been in 1965. Nothing lost. Nothing gained.

When I moved to DC, I became a member of Foundry UMC. I joined a small group of caring people with whom I shared my story. A burden was lifted. My best childhood friend still doesn't know. My parents never knew. School administrators don't know. My Foundry friends know, and that's good enough for me.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for putting us on paths of redemption. Amen.

Anonymous

Ascending

They did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.

Hosea 11:3-4 NIV

One rainy September afternoon, a guillotine fell cleanly through my life and took my former self with it. Gone was my title, role, income. More importantly, gone was my vocation, my space to create, my pathway to beloved East Africa. How could I be a Christian without the ability to work for justice and peace? Without a chance to flinch, I became a political casualty, no longer existing in a whirl of purpose and stress and pride. There was utter nothingness and uncertainty.

In a heap, I descended to the darkest corners of my mind. I could not shake feelings of self-loathing. Thoughts of failure and inadequacy pervaded my mind—rage that excellence and kindness were meaningless in this town. I certainly did not want to leave the house. The thought of having to explain myself made me curdle like yesterday's Icelandic yogurt. The only two activities at my disposal everyday were job hunting and exercise—clearly some outer rung of the inferno.

Through the veil of my anguish, though, the love of my community truly burned brighter. I no longer had a title, or role, or organization, but I had Evan and Sarah and Amanda and Brianne. I had my beautiful family in all its forms—human and Goldendoodle. I had Foundry and every service and small group where I was part of something valuable. Alone I felt a void of uselessness, but surrounded by my community I felt alive again. Every laugh, kindness, and conversation pieced me together and healed me.

Meg Lavery

H.O.P.E.

My brother Charlie recently passed away after a courageous battle with pancreatic cancer (one with very slim odds of surviving long). We were never really close siblings and it took this dreadful disease to bring us closer together.

Charlie lived his last months on earth filled with the courage to face this disease and the Hope of recovering from it. This experience changed our relationship from one preoccupied with distant fear to one filled with the closeness of **H.O.P.E.**

Honesty and Openness

Charlie shared with me the ravages of the chemo treatments. When the chemo became unbearable, he tried an alternative approach of enzymes, changes in diet and he began to feel better. He was **Honest** and **Open** to me about what he believed was the cause of cancer. He had built walls of resentment with his family as he constructed a new house. As he shared his vulnerability, the walls in our old sibling distance came tumbling down.

Power of Fellowship

These conversations led to a blessed visit to Charlie's magnificent home and loving family. We shared walks together and invigorating outings. During this visit with his family including the dogs, we all experienced the **Power** of Fellowship. I later reached out to Charlie when I lost my job.

Essence of God's Love

In my last conversation with Charlie, he was supportive of me and held my vulnerability with no judgment. His last message to me was "God is leading you to a different spiritual path. Enjoy your time on the bench." This message was truly the **Essence** of God's Love.

Prayer:

*God help me grow in **H.O.P.E.** Help me build all of my relationships with Honesty and Openness so that the Power of my fellowship will reveal the Essence of your love.*

Wil Rumble

Home

I don't see my family very often—maybe twice a year. They recently retired, sold my childhood home, and left our home state of Michigan after 55 years. During the most recent holiday season, my wife and I spent extensive time with my immediate and extended family at their new house in Arizona. I've always admired my parents, but the current political climate has revealed some less than admirable elements of their worldview. Perhaps they always held these beliefs, but I was unaware or didn't want to be aware. Either way, after days of arguing or tiptoeing around issues, these beliefs were made apparent, and I found myself disappointed and angry.

In a recent sermon, Pastor Ginger spoke about one of the joys of holidays is “being able to reconnect with a family who fully receives and celebrates you, in which you feel safe.” While my situation is a far cry from many others across this world, I feel like my traditional, biological, physical “home” no longer exists.

However, Pastor Ginger also made an important nuance about family by adding “biological, or chosen.” Those three words, mentioned almost in passing, struck me. My closest friends and community at Foundry have become an adopted family of sorts. My wife, who laughs and lives with all her being, is my home. We share a core set of values and a way of intentional living that I respect and aspire to deeply. I'll continue to pray for the divide between me and my biological family to mend, but I feel at peace when I think of my chosen family and home here.

Evan Mayo

No Matter What You Believe or Doubt

Before he passed away just over a year ago, my partner Patrick would remark to me on how much Ginger's statement of welcome at the beginning of the service meant to him. He told others outside of Foundry about it. In fact, the only voice memo stored on his phone was a recording he had made of Ginger giving that welcome statement. I think he kept it as a reminder of the different ways he felt cherished at Foundry, and by God.

For many of us, the language of the hymns and liturgy we encounter at Foundry provoke questions of belief or doubt. Do I really believe this? Do I believe it in a different way than I used to? Is it literal or symbolic truth? A product of the culture at the time it was written or an eternal truth? Or some of each? What if I don't believe it or disagree with its implications?

One of the strengths of Foundry is that we give each other room to work out our own search for truth, trusting God to know the sincerity of each heart.

I think that Patrick was coming to the realization that it was okay to doubt, that it can be a step forward on our spiritual road. We don't have to have all the answers or see things the same way. Jesus didn't say that the most important thing is to be right. He said that the most important thing is to love, which Patrick saw and heard in abundance at Foundry.

When I hear those words at the beginning of the service, I think of Patrick, and imagine him experiencing that same kind of welcome and acceptance, now in a different world.

Paul Keefer

Resting Alertly

What guides my life today? The answer used to be my past and my ambitions for the future. But in his amazing poem, “I Let Go of My Accumulations,” by Howard Thurman identifies a more profound answer.

In the poem Thurman says, “I let go of the past, I withdraw my grasping hand from the future, and in the great silence of this moment, I alertly rest my soul.” How profound it is to “rest alertly.”

When I first learned about meditation, I thought I was to clear my mind of all intrusive thoughts. Teachers would coach how to ban such thoughts. I mostly failed at this clearance objective.

While Thurman affirms the need to “surrender to God’s care all that I have called my own,” he also suggests that in the ensuing silence of the moment, to be alert and ready to hear or feel what God makes known to us. Although we don’t always stay enmeshed in what Thurman calls our “storehouse” and “fortress” in our surrender of them to God, we are alert to how we can benefit from the past, our hope for the future, and, most of all, the immediate presence of God.

In breath prayers, you take a breath with one line and with the next, you let out the breath. For example, I might first say “Forgive me, God” and then, as I breath out, “for not listening enough.” After repeating a prayer many times, I sometimes find myself newly alert to something I need to know, feel, or do. This prayer practice surrenders thought but also creates alertness and can yield a realization or prompt to action.

Thurman’s poem ends, “I give myself unto thee, O my God. Amen.” I pray that we can all “rest alert” as we give ourselves to God.

Barbara Cambridge

When Parenting Becomes Redemption

And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Matthew 18:5 NIV

My niece, Oni Blair, journeyed with us at Foundry from 2009-2015 while working at the State Department. Foundry was the sacred space where Oni worshiped and served. She exchanged wedding vows with her husband, Chris Hensman, and our congregation witnessed the sacrament of baptism for their daughter, Helen. They continue to live Foundry's call to love God, love each other, and change the world.

When Oni and Chris moved to Houston, both acknowledged a remarkable calling—they wanted to parent siblings who were not born into a nurturing family situation. They decided to pursue the risks and challenges of raising children who were biologically different, but deserving of passionately dedicated parents.

This past June, our family celebrated the arrival of “D” and “E”, ages three and two respectively, who are growing wholesomely in the Blair-Hensman household. While challenges continue to emerge from early childhood scars, these children are the epitome of happy siblings with their big sister, Helen, age 4. We pray for a successful transition from foster care to adoption, when “D” and “E” are declared permanent members of the Blair-Hensman household.

I'm reminded of the biblical leader, Moses, who rose to leadership from an adoptive situation. His Jewish mother hid her infant in a basket along the Nile River to be discovered and raised by the Pharaoh's daughter. God's plan for salvation comes in many forms and under unpredictable circumstances.

Prayer:

May we always be grateful for kinship that offers love, redemption, and new beginnings for children and parents. Amen

Paula Blair

Emmanuel: God with Us

Logan and I are foster parents. We entered the process hoping to adopt a child. While waiting for a pre-adoption placement, we agreed to open our home to teens. We've had two longer-term placements of seven-teen-year olds.

Last summer, Logan and I were given a date for an elementary school-aged child to move into our home, old enough per Maryland law to say she didn't want to be adopted but young enough to need a "forever home." We decided to become legal guardians of the child. With this particular child in mind, there were nine days in the beginning of August when I dreamed dreams of family vacations and mundane days at home together.

Only days before she was to move in, we found out that plans changed for this child, and therefore, plans for us changed. Not because of anything with us, but plans just changed. At Christmas, there was no stocking for the child we were to have. I found myself wanting to cry out: "Why?" "How long, O Lord?" "Alright, if for everything there is a season, when is *this* season ending?"

As Christians we share a faith of persistent hope. God doesn't cause the pain; God is with us on our best and our hardest days. At any given time, any one of us may not be able to affirm that God is with us. But we are not alone. We are in community so that when we need it, we can be there for each other. Through our Christian community, God is always with us.

Prayer:

May we bring all of ourselves into community—not just the polished, curated version we often let others see—but our pain, our loss, our longing for hope. Let God use it all to transform us so that we may be part of God's transformation for our broken world.

T.C. Morrow

Practicing Spirituality

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 1:7 NIV

As a practicing Catholic, I was devastated with the sex abuse scandal that rocked the Catholic community, internationally. I had served with ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick as a lector reading the Gospel and other biblical texts aloud as part of the leadership team at Mass. As a result of the devastating scandal and the accompanying emotional distress it caused me, I wanted to reach out, in an ecumenical way, to churches of other denominations in the local area and perhaps find a group of people which meet regularly and live the Christian way of life on their spiritual journeys.

A friend suggested I try the Practicing Spirituality group that meets weekly at Foundry United Methodist Church. It was a welcome suggestion, and I was most impressed with the wonderful people who are regular members of the class. Every week moral and ethical topics are discussed, and camaraderie prevails. Those who attend come from varying ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which adds flavor to the group, and there is variance in the ages of participants, which adds even more zest to the class. I am pleased to say that a number of the people in the class have become wonderful friends.

When my dear friend, Joan Williams, a member of Practicing Spirituality, became ill recently, the care, compassion and concern shown her by people in the group was astounding. Members took turns taking Joan on outings, and there was an outpouring of love, just like in a real family.

Prayer:

Dear Father, in Your infinite generosity, grant us grace and blessings as we challenge ourselves to practice spirituality in ways that please you.

Carol Cook

Storytelling

Trust in the Lord with all your heart...

Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

When I joined Jill Foster's storytelling class at Foundry, my life changed. Jill asked each participant to present a story, and my choice highlighted my interest in art. I gave my interpretation of Mary Cassatt's "The Boating Party."

A young couple's life arrives at a turning point. Pierre invites his wife Marguerite and baby daughter on an afternoon boat ride to sort it all out. Pulling at the oars, Pierre faces Marguerite and prepares to pour out his hopes and dreams for the future. He wants to leave the family business selling fish at the market and join his brother crewing on a fishing boat. More responsibilities would fall on Marguerite's shoulders; crewing meant dangers at sea.

Marguerite empathizes with Pierre's dreams, not wanting to dash them. "Let me try it," he persuades. She also realizes it means an opportunity for her to learn the family business.

Presenting this story was cathartic. I empathized with the Boating Party couple in the way I face my own life changes and challenges. Sharing my interpretation of the painting reinforced how I've learned to get through difficulties. Like the couple whose situation I envisioned, I have a decision making process, weighing pros and cons, so that I can move forward, with God's help, toward opportunities to grow.

Prayer:

Dear God: Guide our paths toward our fullest potential.

Diane Seeger

Discovering Myself in the Foundry Body of Faith

In [Christ] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Ephesians 2:21-22 NIV

I first came to Foundry in the summer of 1991 at the invitation of Trinidadian friends. My husband and I were just back from a posting abroad and were looking for a church home. That first Sunday we were struck by the level of welcome that we experienced here—not only were individual worshippers curious to meet us, but we were directed to the Welcome Table where we could get a sense of the opportunities for growth and service available at Foundry and ask questions of members of the church.

So after that first day, we were hooked. We settled comfortably and gradually became fully engaged in the life of Foundry. There were interesting study opportunities and many missions to choose from. We also made many friends. We loved our Bible study groups, discussions and book studies in the context of the Sunday Adult Forum, opportunities to pray with congregants after worship on Sundays, and serving on a variety of church committees.

Now, after 27 years, I feel a deep sense of belonging here. I feel a deep sense of connection to so many church friends with whom I share a little piece of Foundry's history. I also feel deep gratitude to the community that has shaped who I am today. And I am now eager to give back, however I can, in a church home where I feel accepted and valued.

Prayer:

God, I thank you for my church home.

Josiane Blackman

Cartwheels, Hopscotch, Ms. Mary Mac

*What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*

Micah 6:8 NIV

I tell my Foundry story often. I tell my story when people ask how long I have been at Foundry and how I got here. I like telling the story.

I came to Foundry after visiting many other churches where I did not feel welcomed. I visited Foundry a long time—coming for the sermons and the music. I was unsure about being a part of a church so large. I grew up in a small country town. The church I attended was the church my grandparents, parents, aunt, and uncles attended long before I was born. So I was more than welcomed. Everyone was “family.”

One Foundry Sunday, a minister stopped me on my way out and invited me to help in summer Sunday school. She’d heard I was a schoolteacher. I was very surprised because I did not think anyone noticed me. I told her I would think about it. I thought I was too busy raising five children, working, and going to graduate school. I really did not have time to spare. Teaching school was not teaching Sunday school. I did not read my Bible regularly. I had many Bibles on my shelf and that is where they stayed.

But God had other plans for me. I agreed to teach one Sunday school class that summer, and 37 years of Sundays later, I am still teaching Sunday school. I had to take down my Bibles and read them. I learned that children’s games were great teaching tools. My Foundry kids learned about God’s Love and inclusiveness while turning cartwheels, playing hopscotch, and clapping hands to Ms. Mary Mac.

It has been a blessing to me.

Fay Allen

I Never Anticipated This

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

Psalm 23:4 NRSV

Several decades ago, Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book entitled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He uses the word “when” and not “why.” The insights he shares come from his family’s struggle with a rare disease that brought his son to an early death. They grappled with the reality that God was not punishing them, rather, God was suffering with them. I shared this many times with families who were experiencing traumatic situations.

Though I’ve been a pastoral caregiver for nearly all of my 40 years of active ministry, I was not prepared for what happened this past year. In July, a vertebra in my lower spine cracked. The pain was intense. I made my way into fall following the guidance of several medical professionals and the limitations imposed by Medicare doctors. Nothing brought significant help, not even cortisone shots. Night after night I struggled to sleep. I wondered if pain was a new normal for me. My doctors were very reluctant to recommend surgery due to risks and potential complications.

I found myself moving beyond wondering why was I plagued with all this pain. What is becoming clearer is that God’s spirit is walking through this dark experience with me. I do not know when, whether, or how this will end, but I am confident that I am not alone. God feels my pain.

I am grateful to Foundry’s pastors, the Prayer Team, the Asbury Methodist Village pastoral care staff, to Jan, and our family who are constant reminders that love and compassion are alive and well in this messy world.

Hal Garman

Peripheral Neuropathy

*A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed
spirit dries up the bones.*

Proverbs 17:22 NIV

Finding the right diagnosis for a medical condition is not always easy. It sometimes requires tenacity. More than one physician was annoyed with me because I told them I was not getting the correct diagnosis and treatment for what was going on in my body. All of them meant well, but most were not willing to listen carefully to my description of what I was experiencing.

Finally, I got the golden ticket. An orthopedic specialist sent me to a neurologist who sent me to an electro-diagnostician. Data was pinpointing my problem. MRI, x-rays, and physical therapy indicated genetic testing would be the next logical step. This, it turned out, was emotionally the most challenging test in all the specialists' goody bags. Nevertheless, it paid off because I now know why specific parts of my body are not functioning like they did for sixty years. Finally, I have an explanation for what has been happening, what is happening, and what may eventually happen. Knowledge is power!

Throughout the entire process, I maintained a cheerful heart and an optimistic outlook. Yes, there have been occasional periods of mild depression. Those usually occurred when I was unclear about what the specialists were babbling about—the unknown is often scarier than the known. Talking to friends, colleagues, and strangers at times helped, and I have discovered that an awkward gait and a walking stick are great conversation starters.

Prayer:

Okay, God, please ride shotgun with me as I cope with my new normal. Each day seems to reveal something unexpected, and I need you to calm my mind as I attempt to understand and accept what's up ahead just around the next corner. Amen.

Stephen Roberts

Integrating Intervals

But seek ye first the kingdom of God...

Matthew 6:33 KJV

When I play the piano, I concentrate on playing the right notes. Similarly, when I sketch, I concentrate on drawing right lines. Recently, I realized that something more was happening—intervals. The tonal difference in the notes creates a harmonic or melodic interval. Even the silence between two notes or chords has meaning and gives expression to the composer's intent. In sketching, a line is defined by its intensity and shape. In pleasing compositions, lines are defined by the space between them and the white space delineated by them.

Intervals have become integral in my spiritual life to make right my relationship with God, distinguishing right doing from right being. I pause at frequent intervals each day for prayer, meditation and study. Participating in community—at worship, through classes and service—becomes the outward means to express my gratitude and to share and learn God's truths with and through others.

As a Christian, a right relationship and practice of loving God comes first. The right works and attitude follow accordingly. When I trust God totally, fulfillment also follows without further worry and often wonderfully beyond my initial expectations.

Just as intervals in inspiring music and art are properly integrated, my spiritual intervals become rightly integrated by my putting God first. I love my neighbor as myself and, as Jesus assured, I live one with God the fully abundant life that God intends for me.

Prayer:

O Divine Master, be with me in every interval of my day, even down to my every breath, so all aspects of my being become rightly related with You. Keep me open to Your freely-given grace in communities that are seeking reconciliation—not domination—and right relationship with You as one Body in Christ. Amen.

Joe Steller

Keep Moving Forward While In-Between

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9 NIV

But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Psalm 86:15 NIV

Are you also feeling as if your very life hangs in the balance while a cosmic battle for light to finally triumph over darkness rages on and on?

God is heavenly justice tempered with grace, but darkness exists within all of us. So our Path Maker is lovingly patient and gives us timely mercy along the way to arrive radiantly victorious.

This heaven-bound odyssey to our final destination is far from linear. Instead, it often feels haphazard. Just when I think I'm back on track to understand where I am supposed to be, I get caught in yet another, unexpected "in-between" moment.

The journey home actually occurs within and without. The trip fare is paid from the price of seemingly never-ending sacrifices deep inside the heart. We are only but a remnant, and sometimes we must walk different legs of our trip without cherished family and friends alongside us. Indeed, precious tears brilliantly illuminate our chosen path. We collectively grieve over the earthly cost at times, but we must keep moving forward with God while in-between. Although quiet, our Creator's eternal comfort promises to faithfully stay with us in every step.

Prayer:

Jesus, Oh Living Redeemer, gently remind us how we continuously receive your compassionate patience, grace and mercy within ourselves. Please lovingly help us to generously give these same gifts away to those we meet on our "in-between" path today. Amen.

Eric M. Walker

Looking Back Across Our Years at Foundry

Love God, love one another, change the world.

Our own spiritual journey witnesses growth in “the whole that is Foundry,” with its unity, diversity, and our need for each other. As we’ve become “seniors” over four decades, we reflect on the continued blessings of Foundry’s talent, prayer and energy. These gifts ground us in this sacred place.

Across many years, we’ve experienced the joy of serving among an array of pastors and talented congregation members with Staff-Parish Relations, the Trustees, Evangelism/new member orientation, Peace Mission discussions, neighborhood Bible study and singing with Jubilate following The Joyful Noise.

Special memories include the 1991 capital campaign to replace a century-old sanctuary roof with Buckingham slate—costly, historically needed, and hopefully good for another 100 years; Foundry bells ringing out each Sunday and that once rang to celebrate a 1970s downtown hostage release; climbing—one time only!—up the bell tower to lubricate those bells; repairing a stray bullet hole in a stained glass sanctuary window; and negotiating greatly needed garage parking on P Street.

We recall one of Stanley Thurston’s early Sundays when he led a men’s choir rendition of Duke Ellington’s “Sunday, Come Sunday” while Foundry women were on retreat. We remember congregation-wide discussions led by Adele Hutchins, Jim Mason and others before our 1996 Administrative Board vote to become a reconciling congregation. We remember erecting the P Street Foundry peace pole and creating Chrismon ornaments for Foundry’s Christmas tree. We think back to when we welcomed Dar Al Hijrah Muslim worshippers to Foundry after 9/11 and later met with them in their Virginia mosque.

We continue to join our lives together with others, seeking where God will lead us next.

Pat and Steve Telkins

When I Was Your Age

For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Psalm 100:5 KJV

People of all ages have crossed my path camouflaged as mentors. Some I had to discern out of career necessity. Others revealed themselves. All I had to do was stop, look, and listen.

I was a new boss to Emmie, the orchestra's legendary ticket office manager twice my age. She was entrenched in her ways and would bristle haughtily when I told her I needed sales numbers not reports like "OK for a Tuesday night." After months of strained relations, we declared truce over lunch. I learned that her gifts included an invaluable memory on how to care for subscribers, our institutional life blood. By the time Emmie retired, we had collaborated on documenting her memory into computerized records, a legacy the orchestra used to keep subscribers' loyalty.

Amelia was half my age and my last hire before I retired. Technologically savvy and unfailingly devoted, she asked if it would be OK if she managed the firm's Twitter account (whatever that was). I was skeptical but Amelia knew these things. Twitter brought our firm its first international client.

During the decades in between, Foundry friends, Joanne and Dayton Coe, became a big sister and brother to Joe and me. They shared generously and showed us what we might expect in the years ahead. They modeled choices we could make as wisely and lovingly as they had.

Foundry's call helps me move beyond generation gaps. To love God and each other means getting to know, listening to, and learning from folks of all generations. Living the call changes me and my little world for the better.

Prayer:

Lord, guide me to be a caring presence that helps us share the joy of being loved.

Joanne Steller

Our Global Community Seen from Nigeria

As a decades-long Foundry member and ordained deacon posted as a Foreign Service Officer in Nigeria, I reflect this Lent on the diversity of the Christian family—and indeed the whole human family of God. For the past three years, my wife Diane and I have lived in Africa's most populous country, as I have served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy.

Some of my most powerful experiences have been preaching—from the Methodist Cathedral, where I spoke on New Beginnings in the life of faith, to a mega-church rally where roughly 800,000 Pentecostal Christians worshipped for seven hours. At that enormous revival, I brought a brief Wesleyan goodwill message about the Great Commandments, the Good Samaritan, and putting faith into action.

But it was an interfaith encounter in this country of roughly 100 million Christians and 100 million Muslims that most challenged my faith. I visited a strife-torn state where thousands have died in conflicts between herders and farmers, often divided along religious lines. I met an extraordinary Imam, octogenarian Abdullahi Abubakar, who risked his life to shield more than 200 Christians in his mosque and home to prevent their massacre by a rampaging mob. I joined in prayers and broke bread with Imam Abdullahi. He inspires me as the most faithful embodiment of the Good Samaritan I have ever met.

Sometimes it can seem easy to characterize African Christians and Muslims. But in Nigeria, I have experienced a depth of spirituality and a focus on justice, peace, and compassion among many believers amidst violence, terrorism, extreme poverty, broken institutions, and a nonexistent safety net. Faith springs from a different seedbed in Nigeria than in Washington, but it is our common faith and our common humanity that unite us all.

David Young

Watch an interview between David and Imam Abdullahi at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHvr8BFHVA4>

Worshipping at Abuja Ark

Since September 2016, my husband David and I have worshipped at Abuja Ark, an all-volunteer, non-denominational church in the capital of Nigeria. Our mission statement reads, “We are a diverse, international community journeying together and growing in Christ, reflecting God’s love and truth in Abuja.”

About 150 people attend each week. We represent a variety of nationalities, and approximately 80 percent are Nigerian. Many worshippers have lived outside the country. I’ve made my best friends here through Abuja Ark.

The worship experience is a contrast to Foundry’s in nearly every way possible. Chairs are set up each week in a hotel meeting room, and we search for seats where the room’s pillars do not block our view. The room is crowded, and seats are scarce until the children leave for Sunday school.

A wooden cross sits on a table covered with local fabric. The service aims to be 90 minutes long, but can be longer depending on who is preaching. Some Sundays the message reflects a biblical literalism that is challenging to hear. Yet, this is my church in Nigeria, and my faith has been enriched here.

Power is fairly consistent, but no one is surprised when lights go out or the equipment doesn’t work quite right. Two screens show the liturgy and words for singing. Our music team includes five or six talented Nigerians who sing and play electric keyboard and guitars. Our music is not African and would be familiar to people who attend services in the United States. Occasionally, we sing a traditional hymn. Our communion liturgy would feel very familiar to Foundry members, though lay people serve communion.

The worship experience mirrors Foundry in the most important way possible—the expression of our faith in one God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Diane Weisz Young

My Friend Jesus

You are my friends if you do what I command.

John 15:14 NIV

In 2008, the year I left America and moved to Nicaragua, the theme of the Lenten Devotional was “Jesus as a Friend.” I took copies with me to teach English to Nicaraguans. I read the booklet (not because I was attracted by the title since I found the title a bit “Sunday school-ish”) and was struck by two contributions. One reflected perfectly on the Taoist philosophy, which I was discovering at the time. The other was by a friend at Foundry who had been on a mission trip to Nicaragua with me, which said (I paraphrase), “I can really say Jesus is my friend, because I spend more time with him than with most of my other friends.”

Living in Nicaragua, a country with a strong traditional faith, has worn down the deep aversion to the Christian faith which I contracted as a result of my youth in Switzerland, a country with an extremely cold version of (state) Calvinism. Now, ten years later, I can truly say that Jesus is my friend. Today I have a much deeper understanding of what “friend” means in the context of Jesus’ teachings.

During a scary depression four years ago, I had a personal encounter with Jesus. He appeared in my bedroom accompanied by his mother. With that encounter, aided importantly by a Christian friend who visited me weekly for bible-reading sessions, I began building a personal relationship with Jesus. This friendship is well-established at this point in my life. With the help of my favorite spiritual book, *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young, I am working on what the Catholics call “continuous prayer”—trying to keep my friend Jesus in my mind all day long.

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus.

Lucian Caspar
Nicaragua

No Task or Service Too Small

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3: 16 -17 NIV

For me, the onset of Advent and the Christmas season brings renewed vibrancy and expectation. I treasure the hope and gladness of the message of Christ's coming and enjoy singing the carols that resound on the radio and in public places adorned with greenery.

It seems reassuring to relive this special time, even now during Lent, as Easter and spring's greenery approach. I often reread—and sing by myself—the texts of Christmas carols and hymns, wondering whether singing some carols some Sundays during the rest of the year should become part of the calendar.

“The Little Drummer Boy” carol embodies a poignant message and portrayal of the nativity scene. The boy stands in awe of the moment in the humble stable where Christ was born—the magnificence of the wise men bringing their gifts in radiant splendor—the glorious sound of the angels' chorus. He realizes his insignificance and that he had no gift to lay beside the manger. But then, looking down at his drum, he realized what he could give. He could play his drum for him. And he played with joy.

Our deeds or service need not be equal to that of persons with considerable ability or stature. Rather, let us serve in the spirit of John Wesley: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can.”

Laetitia Combrinck

Poor as I Am?

What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; yet, what can I give Him: give my heart.”

—*In the Bleak Midwinter*, Verse 4, United Methodist Hymnal, P. 221

Writing a Lenten Devotional is hard. It requires one to sit, think, relax, meditate, pray, and ponder. In 21st Century America, finding space for this is out of the ordinary—almost alien.

As I tried to quiet myself waiting for a muse to strike, this piece of music entered my space. “It’s traditionally Christmas music,” I told myself. “You’re supposed to write about Lent and the coming of Easter.” But the hymn wouldn’t let go so easily. I eventually dismissed my self-imposed restrictions and gave in to the Spirit’s nudging.

The phrase, “poor as I am” captured my attention. We, these days, would typically interpret that to be financially poor. And, yes, some in our midst are struggling financially. But I suspect many more of us experience poverty in terms of time, connections, or spirit.

The last three words in the verse provide a simple, but powerful answer: “Give my heart.” When I give Jesus my heart, I give it for all that he taught us: To care for family and friends. To care for all others—especially the downtrodden. To stand for justice. To find (or make) community and engage.

And I strongly suspect that in caring for others, we might just find that is the best way to care for ourselves.

Prayer:

Dear God, as poor as we are—no matter how defined—please nudge us into the spaces where we can give our hearts.

Michael Lawson

The Might of Small Things

*The Lord loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love.*

Psalms 33:5 NIV

In January, I hiked to the bottom of the majestic Grand Canyon and back, experiencing its enormity and awesome beauty created over eons, small bits at a time.

There are also times when despair grips me over another enormity—climate change. I have feelings of never being able to make a difference. Bishop Gregory Vaughn Palmer, however, encouraged us to not “despise small things” for it is the accumulated weight of small things that force a “tipping point” yielding to a realization of the dream of the beloved community.

Indeed, research shows that when one person takes a small values-based action, such as reducing meat consumption, eliminating single-use plastic, or cutting down on travel, that person is more likely to engage others to repeat the action, eventually causing a social shift.

Norman Wirzba declares in his book *The Paradise of God*:

[T]he work of humanity consists in the hospitable gesture of welcoming and enabling the whole of creation to share in the peace and joy of the divine life... [thus] the work of redemption must entail the fostering of those just conditions that make life possible... [T]he work of justice must move from the ground up to include the whole of creation (P. 21)

I helped found the Arlington, Virginia Energy Masters (VEM) program. VEM trains volunteers to install energy efficiency devices in the apartments of low-income citizens. The program reduces greenhouse gases while helping residents feel more comfortable and save money.

Prayer:

May my small actions to help reduce climate change inspire others' small actions, collectively fostering justice enough to preserve even the enormous Grand Canyon.

Jill Barker

Think on These Things

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Philippians 4:8 RSV

St. Paul the Apostle wrote letters to the scattered churches from his prison cell in Rome. He told of the redemption in Christ Jesus. In 1976 my husband Bill and I were visiting Rome. We heard a tour guide say, “This way, please, to the prison where St. Paul was incarcerated.” At the cell I let my hands move around the bare walls, hoping Paul’s words would give a message to me. One of his letters, my favorite, came to mind: Whatever is just and honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious—think on these things.

The purity of nature feeds my spirit. Recently, on the beautiful trail at my Paul Spring Retirement Community, seemingly a thousand birds were serenading the world. While I was sitting in the gazebo the birds became totally silent for two to three seconds, and then suddenly a single bird burst forth in song. Instantly I heard the song as a prayer for my daughter, who was in surgery for cancer at that moment. My heart leaped up! Never had a prayer been so prayed in such a timely manner for my daughter and for me. It was a hallowed moment. I could hardly wait to share my joy with my community of faith.

I so appreciate my church family’s striving to be obedient to “these things” of which Paul speaks.

Prayer:

Holy One, thank you for your abundant love and grace.

Sunny Branner

Singing the Sun Up

How fortunate I am to “sing the sun up” with the women of Foundry at our annual retreats. As we wait for the sun, we sing nature songs such as “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” “How Great Thou Art,” and “In the Garden.” We read Psalms of creation such as 1, 8, and 121. The sunrise services are times of peace and solace (unless you count the year when we had an additional choir of cows, dogs, and birds).

In another noisy and extra cold year, as Gloria read Psalm 104:22, “when the sun rises,” she looked up and shouted, “Wow!” Suddenly, sun rays of red and orange shone all over the ice on the tree branches. Although we were all shivering in our boots, we all in turn shouted in awe, “Wow!”

I am not a morning person, and it’s even more difficult to get up when you’ve spent a late night playing charades and hooting and hollering. And yet, the sunrise services have grown in popularity. Twenty-five years ago, at the first retreat, there were three of us. Last year there were 15 souls singing up the sun together.

Prayer:

Loving God, I thank you for the gifts and beauty of other women, and the opportunity to worship you together.

Ella Cleveland

Enjoying and Honoring Creation

Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the live stock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.”

Genesis 1:26 NIV

I discovered “Creation Care” when our kids went off to college. Our family decided to have one less car to save money and reduce our carbon footprint. I became the carless one in the family and started walking, biking, and using public transportation. I also discovered that **God often speaks to me when I’m outside**. What a wonderful gift to feel healthier and to enjoy the outdoors more than anytime since I was a kid.

God gave us a sacred responsibility to “take charge of the earth” We are, in effect, God’s representatives as caretakers of creation. Foundry’s newly-established rain garden is a way we are caring for our little piece of Creation. It will help control stormwater runoff and allow natural water absorption. It is God guiding Foundry to minimize the negative impacts on water ecosystems, improve water quality, and minimize pollution.

I also love this large, wooded park with miles of trails right behind us. One of my favorite things about hiking or running those trails on spring weekends is the sound the park generates. There is this hum that is this beautiful combination of all of the noise generated by families picnicking, kids playing games, youth and adult soccer, plus the sounds of the water, birds, animals. And there is one sound that comes through very clearly that brings me joy every time I notice it—laughter. People are running around laughing and enjoying Creation. God’s creation is good and it brings us joy.

Prayer:

May we each look for ways every day to enjoy and honor God’s creation.

Ed Crump

Foundry’s rain garden will be dedicated on Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019.

A Sign of Hope

On a “Celtic Tour” vacation this past summer, my travel group attended the world famous “Royal Military Tattoo” in Edinburgh, Scotland. It was one of the high points of our trip. The setting is a three-sided stadium erected next to Edinburgh Castle, and it holds close to 9,000 people. Every seat was filled. At the beginning of the evening, an announcer read out the names of countless countries from every continent, asking people to respond when they heard the name of theirs. It was truly a world-wide audience.

What followed was an amazing show with performers from the UK to the US, Europe, the Middle East, the Far East, South America, Africa and more—singing, dancing, playing the bagpipes, riding horses, putting on military displays and providing history lessons. It was a feast for all of the senses! In the middle of the show, a female singer was performing and requested the audience join her in singing “Amazing Grace.” Hearing close to 9,000 people all singing this beautiful hymn together brought me to tears. God was surely moving in this place.

After a year and a half of the stress and distress caused by the political climate at home, this experience was a balm for my soul. It gave me hope to remember that there are loving, like-minded people all over the world. Together, we must keep moving toward peace and justice with love.

Prayer:

Dear Loving Savior, help us to see the good in all of your children, and guide us in our work to bring wholeness to this beautiful, broken world. We thank you and praise your holy name. Amen.

Martha Kossoff

High Wire

*The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands
the foolish one tears hers down.*

Proverbs 14:1 NIV

Thirty years ago, I was watching some morning news show, like *Today*. The human-interest story was about an old man walking the tightrope. It was a family affair, and the daughter was watching her father from the ground slowly crossing the wire from one building to another.

Watching intently, she screamed and then started to cry. The man next to her exclaimed, “you’re paranoid.” Everything appeared to be going fine as the father crossed overhead. But then there was trouble. The wire started to shake and the balance bar he held fell. Then the man on the wire lost his balance. In an effort to save himself, he grabbed the wire with both hands, but he could not hold on and fell to his death.

The daughter was crying before everyone else knew what was coming. She grew up surrounded by rope walkers and knew the high-wire act inside and out. The spectator who made a big noise that got a lot of attention on TV was long gone. But he, of course, was wrong. He did not have the experience to understand that all it took was a slight breeze, a misstep, or the swing of the balance bar for it all to go wrong.

As we travel life’s journey, I am reminded that there are quiet experts among us that know what is coming—intuitive people. They don’t proclaim their knowledge loudly, but they are wise from experience.

Prayer:

We are vulnerable, Lord. It’s easy to slip off life’s high wire; for it all to go wrong. Help me listen for the quiet experts. May I be one as well.

Bill McLeod

When God Doesn't Say Yes

“Some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.” —Garth Brooks

When I was a kid, I prayed mightily for a fancy—and expensive—new bicycle for my birthday. I never got that bike, but my dad suggested instead that we build a soap-box derby race car out of scrap wood. That turned out to be a wonderful project and remains one of my fondest memories of my father.

Too often, I honor the ritual of daily prayer in the breach. In the rush of everyday obligations, it is easy to forget to pray. And, I admit, sometimes I rely on the meditations posted on social media as a stand-in for personal prayer.

Even worse, I find that I mostly go to God in times of great need—desperation or anger or pain or want. While that can be comforting, it also can generate extravagant and unwise asks.

We risk disappointment and dashed expectations if we expect God to answer every prayer with a “yes.” Many’s-the-time that I realized, after-the-fact, that my most fervent wish, if granted, would have sent me in an unwelcome direction—with dire consequences.

God hears all our prayers, but we must trust in that divine wisdom to answer appropriately and at the right time. More and more, I find that praying helps me sort out my priorities—for family, for Foundry, and the world—and moves me in the right direction. And I’m not dismayed when God chooses not to provide what I ask for.

“There are more tears shed over answered prayers.”

—Attributed to Teresa of Avila

Stan Wellborn

Parable for Lent

*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold
you with My righteous right hand.*

Isaiah 41:10 NIV

I heard a parable for the first time in 2001 in a sermon at Foundry United Methodist Church, and it has stayed with me since then.

An old Cherokee chief was teaching his grandson about life.

“A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy. “It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil. He is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, self-doubt, and ego. The other is good. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside you and inside every other person too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old chief simply replied, “The one you feed.”

During this season of Lent, let us all remember to ask God for His help in order to feed the good wolf inside of us and fight the evil one.

Prayer:

Help us put our faith in You, dear God. Your strength becomes ours and You reach out to help us and keep us from falling.

Jill Neuendorf

Tell the Story

*One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell
in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the
beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.*

Psalm 27:4 NIV

I remember my first Sunday at Foundry in 1990 and how the sermon made me cry. I don't recall why.

I remember Mike Koob's introduction to the Housing Mission where Foundry folk helped seniors stay in their homes.

I remember how we always started with prayer, and then I did an odd job like scrub kitchen walls with a broom, install light bulbs or ceiling tiles, paint walls or new windows or a closet or banister, declutter various collections of books or clothing or stuffed animals, even assist with electrical or plumbing under the sink.

I remember Annie Belle Daisy teaching spiritual practices to a wide circle of us in room 203.

I remember new life from gazing at an icon.

I remember that healing invitation to God's world because we belong to him.

I remember the inexpressible beauty of Jesus shining love into my heart.

I remember last Sunday when we celebrated Martin Luther King, Jr., my heart filled with love for God and the people in this place and in the world.

Prayer:

Dear God, help us walk in your light and love one another.

Jeanette Barker

Help Me—The Road to Redemption

Resting firmly in my mind, these two words—help me—hold great meaning in my faith journey. In 2012, I walked into Foundry looking for something familiar yet different. I discovered familiar tones of Methodism: grace, love, and doing good works. Yet I was struggling in my life.

As some of you know, one day I met a pastor named Theresa. Pastor T extended her hand. I said “Help me.” She held my hand and said, “Let me hold your hand until you are able to hold someone else’s. I love you and God loves you.” That day was transformative for me. Today, I am reminded of that love through this daily prayer of Mother Teresa’s:

Help me to spread thy fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with thy spirit and love. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of thine. Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel thy presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only you. Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine, so to shine as to be a light to others. Amen.

Today, I celebrate that initial contact with Pastor Theresa and her allowing the space for God’s presence in my soul, allowing the radiance of God’s light to shine through her into me. That she was able to hold my hand until I could “see not only me” but be a light to others. It is on this road to redemption that I travel in light.

For a beautiful musical take on this prayer, search YouTube for “Prayer” by Rene Clausen.

John Harden

Feeding Each Other

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

Luke 14:13-14 NIV

I've been thinking a lot lately about a story Pastor Ginger told during a sermon this past year. It was about someone who traveled to Heaven and Hell and saw in both places a group of people sitting at a dinner table, struggling to eat with arms too long to reach their mouths. The main difference was that in Heaven, the people worked to feed one another, but in Hell, they all kept to themselves and starved.

I haven't been able to stop thinking about this story. These past three years, I've been struggling to find my place in the hustle and bustle of DC life. I've heard people say that my optimism is actually naiveté and my attempt to be kind to others makes me a pushover. That if I keep acting how I do, I'll get eaten alive in the ego-driven world of Washington. How does anyone balance something like this? With wealth inequality at its highest, oligarchies rising in place of democracy, and a political field that seems more like a circus than a system of governance, it's gotten so easy to fall into a stupor.

People don't trust one another anymore; it has to be "every person for him/herself." Trying to be hopeful just makes you a sucker. This is not a world I want to live in. And I truly don't think it has to be that way. Because I've met amazing people in this city who want to make the world a better place and treat people well while doing it. I have hope, not because I'm naïve, but because I've seen the brightness in the dark. It might shine only a little, but the moment others start noticing it, that light can become so much brighter in the end. We just have to start feeding one another.

Beth Gawne

The Path to Freedom

The time... has... come—when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter. God is... Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves...

John 4: 23-24 MSG

Read John 4:3-30

“I’m past the Jesus thing,” a friend remarked. And, right then, I recognized that his words could have been mine.

Years earlier, that same friend gave me a book that opened my understanding of the divine consciousness within me—a consciousness nurtured through my time spent in a Buddhist community. But, since then, fear had weighed me down. I hid from myself and from the community that I loved. I feared condemnation.

So, I went alone one day with the Samaritan woman to the well. I went seeking drink to briefly dull the pain. I envisioned Jesus through her experience in an unfiltered way. I learned that Love cared only that our relationship came from my true self.

Love taught me that *I am not my pain*, only the awareness behind it. I could embrace pain as other and detach myself to gain freedom.

To paraphrase a character in *Call the Midwife*, “the conflict is between the divine love that is the aware-center of our being and what we’ve been told is right by the outer community (from which our pain separates us). This quarrel... is within us, between our desires and that which is demanded; between the body and its longings, the soul and its terrors, and the mind yearning to be free. The quarrel defines us, drives us forward, upwards to our knees in prayer. We must embrace the quarrel. The quarrel will lead us to the answer. It is everything we are.”

Karl Marshall

Black Jesus Banners

Until a group of Foundry artists worked with a local artist on a new set of banners, our sanctuary had 12 mostly permanent images of Jesus. All 12 represent the 1950's light haired, pseudo-Euro American, white Jesus.

Yet, this is 2019 and there's been significant scholarship reclaiming the Jewish and non-European ancestry of Jesus. And still our ideas of that historic Jesus are bumping up against a mountain of images and stories that still decorate our sacred spaces.

In addition to the visual image, it's the accompanying narrative that this European Jesus is the epitome of power, echoing the domination of those countries over the rest of the world.

Even though I grew up in liberal-ish congregations that were predominately white we paid no critical attention to this image of Jesus or the attending narratives of whiteness equaling all that is sacred. In contrast to these narratives of sacred whiteness, Blacks, Arabs or Asians were depicted as either exotic or demonic and rarely allowed to be human, let alone divine.

These narratives mean I read scripture more with my experience of whiteness, of having easy access to the corridors of power and money than with the experience of Jesus, of the oppressed, of someone who would have been questioned at the border. I read the parable of the ten Minas (Luke 19:11-27), with judgment toward the enslaved, rather than the slaveholder. I forget that just a few chapters earlier Jesus says the poor will inherit the earth.

Our black Jesus banners, remind me that my discomfort, wanting to avert my eyes from his gaze, is a response to that lingering white American Christian narrative within me.

Prayer:

Lord, I can see how I'm still afraid to admit just how tangled and imprisoned I am in those old images. Open my heart. Set me free.

Cassandra Lawrence

Washing Us Clean

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 4:31-32 NIV

Kevin Wright, previously Associate Pastor at Foundry, once used a high efficiency washing machine as a metaphor for relationships. Tumbling into one another in community, we wash each other clean.

I love this image. It is our interactions with each other (even the bumpy ones!) that help us grow more God-like! But I also know that a forgotten tissue in a pocket can leave lint over everything. In the same way, resentment can leave its mark on a community. It doesn't take much sometimes to leave church feeling hurt or angry. How do we make Foundry a place where we all go forth as better people?

In Ephesians 4, Paul talks about the need for unity in the Body of Christ as we each play our part in becoming a mature church. We need the prophets and teachers and pastors to build us up and prepare us for works of service. We need to live a new life together and to let go of our hurt and anger, while speaking the truth in love with each other.

I find an odd comfort in hearing these words to a church almost 2000 years ago. Hey, they were as messed up as we are! And the sacred community continues nonetheless.

Joanne Garlow

Traveling The Redemption Road: Medina in September

September 15, 2003 began as a normal day for others but not for me. Heading home from a job at a bank in Medina, Ohio, two cars ahead of me were driving very slowly. Impatient, I crossed over the double yellow line trying to pass. It was then I ran headlong into an SUV. I heard a baby crying and people calling for help. I and the family I'd crashed into were treated for injuries ranging from a broken arm to bruises. The man who towed away my car said that the driver should have been killed on impact. I was charged with vehicular assault, pleaded no contest and received probation. I had to rebuild my life, and live with the guilt and shame of hurting people.

How do you ask for Forgiveness and Redemption when you carry the burden of shame? For years I found it difficult to sleep without hearing the cries of the baby in the SUV. Then I recalled Psalm 51:1-3, where David repents of infidelity with Bathsheba. These opening lines really get to the heart of my story:

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I acknowledge my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.*

Redemption never happens without Contrition. I lived in a cloud of darkness and shame, only to be lifted by the Loving Grace of God. My road to Redemption remains long, but Jesus Christ is my traveling companion.

Prayer:

Father, I acknowledge my sin and imperfection. Forgive me for falling short, and May Your Grace be Sufficient for me and others. Amen.

Serge Thomas

My Redeemer Lives

*For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.*

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire”

One of the great blessings of my life is recalling those who have been Christ to me, whether they knew it or not. Many are friends to this day, others have passed on, and there are still others whose names I’ve never known.

I’ll never forget a challenging time in our lives when my wife and I were ministered to by a city sanitation worker. Seeing the look of distress on my pregnant wife’s face, the man jumped off his truck and came running over. “Can I give you a hug?” he asked my surprised wife. “You look like you could use it.” My wife nodded, and the man gave her a big hug. Then he jumped back onto his truck and drove away. We never saw him again. We don’t know his name. But I am absolutely sure he was Christ to us that day.

I’m sure my elderly teacher-friends Carl and Lucille Harris never thought of themselves as Christ. But for decades, they ministered to me and many other students at Wake Forest University, opening their home and their pocketbook to anyone in need. They were especially concerned for the disadvantaged and the marginalized. Near the end of their lives, they were loud advocates for LGBTQ inclusion in the church. “It’s a matter of human dignity,” they said. Carl and Lucille saw Christ everywhere they went, because wherever they went, Christ went too.

Carl, Lucille, and the unnamed sanitation worker—among so many others—have shown me that my Redeemer lives.

Deryl Davis

Bloom

Last year, a friend gifted me with a *Hippeastrum* bulb. Over the coming weeks, I watched as leaves and flowers sprouted from the bulb—vertical shoots coming from the small round sphere. Life kept growing.

The coiled bulb with flowers nestled within is a metaphor for our lives. We become more than we are at this moment, and there is always more. We continue to grow—in love, mercy, faith, hope, charity, justice—and we continue to bloom.

Lent is about the drift toward spring, when what was buried below the snow emerges. It's when things unknown start to grow, uncoiling and blossoming before us.

Our lives are a series of seasons—fresh spring mornings, lazy summer afternoons, crisp autumn sunsets, frozen winter nights. We feel these seasons in our bodies and hearts. Sometimes we're growing, sometimes we're blossoming. And sometimes our leaves are falling off for the winter. We experience it all.

We grow from our faith and from God, becoming more than we ever expected or hoped. We travel along the path not knowing where it will lead but trusting it will lead us to who we were meant to be. Leading us toward bloom.

Prayer:

Lord, help me to grow from and in you.

Beth Scott

The Dirt People

*Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and
breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man
became a living being.*

Genesis 2:7 NRSV

It seems like I spent every evening growing up outside working in the garden with my mom. Perhaps it was my natural inclination toward the earth or perhaps it was the dirt that my sister fed me as an infant, but something about the soil fed me (and not just literally). Though I didn't realize it then, gardening in those cool summer evenings was my spiritual foundation.

It wasn't until my college years that I realized those sacred summer evenings were meditations with God. I had what Pope Francis calls "An Ecological Conversion." At a Christian conference in Kansas City, my spirit and religion came together. Like a breath of air, the dualism of earth vs. heaven, flesh vs. spirit was erased. I realized that part of our role here on earth is to sustain and steward God's Creation.

In the oldest Creation story, written in Genesis 2, God bends down to the beautiful earth, and, with softly cupped hands, brings the fragrant, rich soil to God's face. With a breath of air, ruach, the soil, adamah, is transformed into the first living being—the adam. Adam is less a name than a title: dirt person. Adam from adamah. Human from humus. This Earth Day may we live into our role as dirt people giving to the soil which gives us life.

Prayer:

*Through soil and breath, we are crafted by God to serve and protect
this world.*

Avery Davis Lamb

*Avery will lead "Christianity & Creation,"
a Foundry adult education series beginning April 28.*

How a Scientist Tries to Reconcile Matters of Faith and Science with Integrity

And God looked at what he had done, and it was very good! Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or rude. For now there are faith hope, and love. But of these three, the greatest is love.

Genesis 1:31; 1 and Corinthians 13: 4, 13 CEV

Over the past few years, I've become increasingly interested in the sad historical relationship between matters of science and matters of faith and personal belief. Christian theologians and theologians of other faiths have been working overtime in recent years to provide us with the academic tools to reconcile the perceived conflicts between science and faith.

The most I can really do in this short space is to share where I am as a meteorologist and a person of faith. The Hebrew tradition and the early church spoke through the scriptures. Those scriptures, not surprisingly, spoke in terms of the science of their times—a three-tiered 'universe' with an interventionist God in the clouds solving our problems! In many ways, that 'universe' still plays a large role in our worship and church life. The crisis of global warming gets little to no attention. If we truly loved God and God's world, we would be speaking and acting more forcefully about such a serious crisis.

Personally, I deal with the conflict by reminding myself that science asks and tries to answer our "what" and "how" questions, while religious faiths tend to answer our "why" questions. When we are being effective, we teach each other how to live together peacefully and to love one another and our world in meaningful ways.

Chuck Kluepfel

Empathy!

*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you
will fulfill the law of Christ.*

Galatians 6:2 NIV

After backbreaking shoveling to remove snow from a non-designated parking space, a neighbor posted a sign requesting no one park there. Later in the day, another neighbor arrived home, saw the sign, and slowly drove her BMW into the space scooting the bucket forward and finally smashing it against the curb. Chin up, shoulders back, she walked to her townhouse.



Empathy is the ability to feel what other people are feeling, to recognize and accept those feelings. It is the ability to step into their shoes and walk a while, drawing conclusions on why they behave and feel the way they do. As a neighbor of both people in the story, I can walk in their shoes, but one pair is much more comfortable than the other.

Prayer:

God, people's behavior says so much about them. I want to like all my neighbors, but their actions occasionally make it challenging. Help! Amen.

Ta-Chen Wu

Foundry at General Conference

In the year 2000, I had been attending Foundry for two years. After a long struggle of believing that my homosexuality was sinful, I was becoming aware that it was actually a gift from God—not something to be ashamed of, but instead to be thankful for.

Although I had found a welcoming environment at Foundry, I also had an awareness that the United Methodist denomination was not as welcoming, with prohibitions against LGBTQ+ clergy, same-sex unions, and the “practice of homosexuality”.

I also became aware of groups that believed the positions of the Methodist church were wrong, and that these groups, including people from Foundry, were going to be present at the General Conference in Cleveland that year. I decided to go as well.

Hundreds of us advocated for change in the church. At a civil disobedience training session, Gandhi’s grandson and Martin Luther King’s granddaughter spoke for LGBTQ+ equality, and I had the great blessing of meeting Patrick, who would soon become my partner. The experience of joining others to advocate for a cause I believe in was uplifting. It gave me a sense of being a part of history.

In February, there was a Special General Conference devoted solely to the future structure of the Methodist denomination and seeking ways to better reflect the differing views on human sexuality. The Foundry contingent present there served as a living witness to inclusion, justice, and radical hospitality for LGBTQ+ persons—with a real sense of community in the face of conflict.

When you read this, the conference will be in our rear view mirror, and we will be moving ahead in light of what was decided.

Prayer:

May we remember that God’s work will continue regardless of the outcome, and that Foundry continues to be called to love God, love each other, and change the world.

Paul Keefer

Witness

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:15-16 NIV

For the 25th consecutive year, members of the Foundry community have let their light shine in witness to living our church call: Love God. Love each other. Change the world. They dared to share personal stories that, taken together, illuminate who we are and where God is leading us as a community. Whenever a devotional moves you, please consider sharing your response with the author or with someone who came to mind. In doing so, you may find new, renewed, or deeper relationships with yourself, God, and others.

Gratitude

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15 NIV

We are grateful to the unprecedented number of writers and artists whose creative contributions grace the pages of Foundry's 2019 Lenten Devotional. To the participants of the Creative Workshop series, thank you for serving as collaborators in the process. Whether or not your devotional appears here, yours was a valuable presence.

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Foundry's 2019 Lenten Devotional is available online at www.foundryumc.org

This Is Us
Traveling the Redemption Road



2019 Lenten Devotional