

## 30 Days of Devotionals - Nov. 2024

**Day 1: Healing and Positivity – Philippians 4:8** *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think on these things.*

Paul is writing to his faithful friends and supporters in Philippi from a grim prison cell. His circumstances are dire and there were surely few rays of light for him as he sat chained to a wall with little food or fresh water. He seems to get in trouble every time he opens his mouth. The politics of Roman power need him to be somebody that he no longer is, so they do all they can to silence and break him. But he does not break. Why? Because he focuses his whole mind and energy on what is good and true, his unwavering faith, and the support of his colleagues. He focuses on the sweet transformation that he finds in intimacy with Christ through prayer, an intimacy that has found a way to turn him from a fire breathing violent opponent to the message of Jesus into a soul stirring messenger. Granted, Paul is human and his motives, like our own, are often mixed even when at their best. Still, the wisdom of this message resounds through the ages. Don't focus on the pain and opposition. Don't waste energy on your fear. Focus instead on everything that is good and pure and praiseworthy. As you face the challenges of your life today, whether they

are physical, relational, communal or spiritual, see if you can take a deep breath and focus on what is good. Allow your thoughts to rise with gratitude and praise to God for working even in trouble to bring you to wholeness. Can you begin to feel a new energy? If not, try this for several days and see what happens.

**Prayer:** God of every Healing Grace, help me to focus on the good things in my life. With my new focus, help the hurt to recede and lose its power. Fill the space left by worry's exit with praise instead. In Jesus' holy name I pray. Amen.

**Day 2: The Healing Power of Being Loved – Mark 10:21** *Jesus looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."* Today's verse comes from the familiar story of Jesus' encounter with a rich young man. This man has tried his whole life to do the right thing. He has kept every law to the letter. Yet he is restless and feels that he is missing out on something more, something deeper, something he calls the kingdom of God. What is he chasing? Peace? An emotion? Feeling safe in his righteousness? Is there something in his spirit that knows, but cannot identify, that his values have gotten a little skewed? That he feels better making a buck than giving a buck? That his security lies in his material wealth rather than being pliable and usable to God? We don't know. The passage tells us that Jesus seems to see his 'illness.' Jesus immediately knows that he has made his wealth, his security, his comfort his ultimate God, and until that idol is taken from the throne, the man will never know the kingdom of God, that amazing intimate rule of the heart by God's own values. Granted, healing often requires that we release our false allegiances but we will look at that later on in this series. Today focus on the phrase: Jesus looking at him (this indicates a constant and discerning gaze) loved him. Even though the man had problematic values, even though his motives were mixed at best, Jesus loved him just the way he was, before he made any decisions. At this point in his story, the man is not ready for healing and wholeness. He makes the decision to walk away from it. But Jesus loved him through it all, just like he does each of us. Sometimes we feel restless, focus on the wrong things and give them too much power. Still, knowing all of that, Jesus' love remains focused on us inviting us to the new medicine of freedom that comes from releasing our little gods and following him. Think for a moment whether or not there are things other than God that you have given control over your life. Are you ready to begin to untangle from

them? It doesn't have to be radical or all at once. We can untie the knots thread by thread. Each release brings us closer to wholeness. Take a moment and see what occurs to you.

**Prayer:** God of every healing grace, I thank you for your love that gives me the courage to change and to heal. Help me today to relax into your love. Soften my heart and help me heal. In Jesus' holy name I pray. Amen.

**Day 3: The Healing Power of Loving – Matthew 22:36-40** *“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 will 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.”*

These few verses, often called the Summary of the Law, or The Greatest Commandment offer us the core of what it means to be a disciple. That core is always love. Yesterday we thought for a few moments about the healing power of being loved. Today, take some time to think about the healing power of loving. The Greek word that Jesus uses here is *agape*. It is one of a number of words in the New Testament that we translate in to English as love. To realize the healing power of agape love, it is important to remember that love is a choice and not necessarily an emotion. To love in the New Testament is not so much a category of the heart as an ethic. Agape love is an unshakeable orientation, an unlimited and unconditional orientation, toward others and the world. Agape always insists on doing the best for the beloved. Agape can certainly be accompanied by strong emotions. It is simply not dependent upon them. It is righteousness in action that summons healing, growth and perfection in the one to whom it is aimed. It is difficult to experience the healing power of agape when we make our love and loving action conditional or subject to our own waxing and waning emotions. Love is a practice and practical choice that we make daily, sometimes moment by moment regardless of how we feel. It is in that choice that both the power and healing potential reside. Today, think about what it might mean for you to embrace that unshakeable orientation. What will you do to express that love toward God? How might you express agape of neighbor today both in the particular and in the communal sense? How can you offer love and do the best for yourself given your circumstances, responsibilities, desires and limitations? These are serious questions and I hope you will take a moment today to

ponder them. Open yourself up to any insight and healing from God that may arise.

**Prayer:** O God of Limitless Love, today open our eyes to see, receive and return your love. Give us Spirit power to love others and ourselves as you have so lavishly loved us. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 4: The Healing Power of Curing – Matthew 12:22** *Then they brought to him a demon possessed man who was blind and mute, and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see.”*

As with so many of the big themes in the New Testament, there are a number of Greek words used to help convey the depth and meaning of experiences. That is, of course, the case for the concept of healing or cure. We will deal with several of them as we go forward this month. Today the word Matthew was inspired to use is a form of *therapeuo*. This powerful, though less frequently used, word chiefly means 'to wait upon someone as an attendant.' It is sometimes, as in this verse, used to refer to caring for the sick, treating or curing them through hands on care and attention. In this story the crowds following Jesus bring him a demon possessed man whose affliction left him blind and mute. In the ancient world demons were understood not only as adversarial spiritual powers, but also as any process, habit, structure or problem that makes full life impossible. If we look at today's story from a broad point of view, we can see that whatever afflicted the man had left him with no voice and no way to see a way through his problems to the good life for which he was born. Many of us can relate to that. We can feel powerless in a situation of conflict and become totally unable to speak. We can be lost in a fog of our own, or the world's, worries and become unable to see a path forward through it all. What would it be like for Jesus to 'attend' to you in moments like that? Where do you feel silenced or unable to see straight? How might you come to Jesus for help? Is there someone who can lead you? Our passage does not tell us how exactly Jesus effected this cure. Only that he did. That says to me that the method of our healing will be unique and perfect for each of us. In my times of affliction, I often find that I need nothing but for Jesus to attend to me, to draw near and hear me in order to clear my eyes and find my voice. How do you feel Jesus' attention most clearly? How can you go there more often? Take a deep breath and see what occurs to you.

**Prayer:** O God, how can the miracle be true that you attend to me in my need? It seems impossible. Still I know that it is so. Help me today to make room for

your attention and to be open to the newness it invariably brings. In Jesus' holy name I pray. Amen.

**Day 5: The Healing Power of Faith – Mark 5:34** *“He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease.”*

This powerful story of the healing of an outcast and ill woman who sneaks up to Jesus in a crowd to touch the hem of his garment, is one of my favorites. As a person who has dealt with chronic illness since the age of three myself, I know what it feels like for life to become small and defined by my inabilities rather than my abilities. I know what it is like to spend all my money on doctors and become worse rather than better. I need what she received and maybe you do too. The powerful word that we translate ‘made well’ in this verse is the ordinary Greek word for salvation, *sozo*. It means to be made whole, put back together again whole. It is much like the Hebrew concept of shalom which means to experience peace and wholeness that is unassailable. In Matthew’s version of this story (Matthew 14:36) he uses a form of this word ‘diasozo’ which means to bring safely through, to rescue someone into wholeness or to thoroughly cure and preserve. While I have not often, although occasionally, experienced the kind of dramatic physical cure that this story conjures in our modern minds, I have and do, often, experience the indescribable power of being put back together and brought through. Sometimes that includes physical restoration. Often it more dramatically includes emotional or spiritual cure and awareness of a new wholeness in my life. It is interesting that the vehicle for *sozo* in this verse is not Jesus physical presence or her touch of him. It is her faith that he can make a difference in her life. The word faith in Greek simply means to trust. It is not about tents or beliefs or even really thoughts. It is the capacity to lean into Jesus and trust that somehow in the ways that are perfect for you, he will bring you through. Are there areas of your life in which you long for wholeness? Circumstances that you need God to bring you through? If so, take a moment to go to God, reach out in trust and see what happens next.

**Prayer:** God of Grace and Deliverance, we thank you that you always bring us through. Help us today to trust in your perfect grace and reach out to take your hand. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 6: The Healing Power of Sabbath – Deuteronomy 5:12** *Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days*

*you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.*

Once, years ago, I was walking through the silent halls of a Benedictine convent not far from the church where I served as pastor. I went there regularly for times of quiet, prayer and a kind of reorientation of my wild inner world. The large main hallway, dimly lit, had worn wooden floors with clear depression made from decades of nuns walking toward their rooms, the chapel or the cafeteria. I could walk to those places with my eyes closed just by feel of foot. On this day, I have no idea what the expression was on my face, nor do I remember the pace of my steps, nor the to do list ever in my head. Whatever it was, one of the sisters noticed as she passed me. In a quiet clear voice, she said, “Eugenia, just stop. When was the last time you just stopped?” It took my breath away and left me nearly in tears. The word sabbath simply means to cease or to stop. It is not just about not doing, however. It is about *releasing* doing, controlling, working in order to create internal space to be with God and allow God to reorient your priorities. There is an amazing letting go that happens when we stop running, stop working, stop trying to fix, stop working our problems with loops of worrying. It is a lightness that heals. And it does not simply heal the soul who stops. It begins the universe shaking process of healing the created order. When no one is working for sabbath, all are equal. No one is accumulating. No one is counting. No one is left out. When we stop the mad rush of life, even the earth takes a breath as cars stand still and polluters stop their poisons and we find that skies clear, birds sing and rivers sparkle again. Sabbath is always a choice. It is not forced. And it is nearly never experienced in modern western society. We fill our stopping with other kinds of doing, recreation, catching up on bills or housework, trying to get ahead of the week to come. This will kill a person and a society. In what way do you need the healing of sabbath today? What would it be like for you to just stop and rest in God and God’s love. Try it for even a short time and see what happens.

**Prayer:** God of Grace and Wisdom, help us today to find the courage to accept sabbath rest. Heal us in our stopping so that we may be different in our going. In Jesus’ holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 7: The Healing Power of Boundaries** – Genesis 2:15-17 *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”*

Like Adam and Eve before us, many of us struggle with accepting or setting boundaries. We sometimes think that a boundary is a negative limitation on our freedom or our capacity to think for ourselves and so we resist. Wearing a mask when we are ill or around vulnerable people is no longer a reasonable restriction but grows in our minds into an unreasonable oppression. Driving the speed limit, wearing a seatbelt, not parking in a handicapped space, all begin to chafe when we want what we want, when we want it, the way we want it, and, somehow, come to believe that we must have it and restrictions don't apply to us. We will take our chances with the law, with our and other people's safety because we are sure that nothing will happen to us and that is all that matters. Could we be a little more like Adam and Eve that we thought? Maybe we think that if God set the boundary we would certainly follow it no questions asked. I am not so sure. Do we take God's name in vain sometimes? Do we put other things before God in our priorities? Do we ever stop for sabbath reorientation? Do we kill with a word, steal with a policy? In truth many of us do those things often. What we sometimes fail to remember is that boundaries set by God or for the common good are always in our best interest. Adam and Eve found that out the hard way and often we do too. There is healing a plenty in choosing to trust God and live within the healthy boundaries God, and love of neighbor and self, set. Take a moment today to ponder the healthy boundaries that you sometimes push against or reject out right. Why is that? What are the negative consequences? Is the thrill lasting? Does the 'forbidden fruit' live up to your expectations? True healing and safety come from choosing the good even when the outside object seems to sparkle with a promise you cannot live without.

**Prayer:** O God of Loving Boundaries, we know in our hearts the many ways we 'rebel against divine governance.' Help us today to see the boundaries that are set in place for our good and to find courage to live joyfully within them. In Jesus' holy name we pray.

**Day 8: The Healing Power of Respect** – Exodus 20:15 *“You shall not steal.”* The Ten Commandments give us a compact definition of our responsibilities to God and to each other. Together they provide us with a picture of the kind

of world and community that God intends. These words have depths of meaning that we may miss with a cursory interpretation. Perhaps none so startlingly as the eighth commandment that is today's verse. Of course this command has to do with the prohibition against taking personal property that belongs to another. There is much more at stake here than that though. This word warns us against taking advantage by deception, policies that rob a person of the capacity to make a living and, perhaps most poignantly, the stealing of a person's dignity and self-esteem with words or actions that disrespect or denigrate. In the USA, and perhaps globally, we are living in a time when disrespect in language and action seems rampant. Many think little of uttering hurtful, fraudulent words to get what they want. Some see the disrespect of whole groups of peoples, norms, traditions and cultures as justified and even laudable. We don't have to scratch the surface to see the powerful damage this does to persons, souls, communities and the unity of the human family. God recognizes the healing power of offering respect and of being respected. When that is our commitment, choices for the common good come naturally. When respect for another's property, rights and dignity are the lens through which we see the world, then we take our rightful place as siblings, each with unique beauty, capacity, and purpose. Think today of a time when you felt respected. How did that affect your body? Your spirit? Are there times when you find yourself disrespecting others or even yourself? What happens then? When we make the commitment that we will not take from another that which makes a life of dignity possible, we usually find that our own life becomes one that we, and others, can freely respect as well.

**Prayer:** God of Grace, we thank you for the reminder that respect itself is medicine. Help us today to learn to offer and receive respect so that we and our country can heal. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 9: The Healing Power of the Truth - John 8:31-32** *"Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

In chapter 8 of John's gospel we find Jesus wrestling with his opponents, his disciples and even to an extent with himself. After the beautiful story of Jesus offering grace to the woman taken in adultery, he finds himself once again having to justify himself to those who think that he is getting too uppity and going out a little too far on a dangerous theological limb. He is frustrated and thinks that he has so much to teach that could change their lives and they are

just too blinded by their own perspectives to see. Still, some are awakening to his words. It is to those early risers that Jesus speaks today's words. He tells them that is, if they linger therein his words and allow them to unfold with power within, they will know the truth. Further he tells us that that truth will set us free from any bondage that prevents us from enlightenment and the life for which we were created. The word translated as truth, *aletheian*, refers to big truth, not only factual truth. *Aletheian* is the truth at the heart of things, the truth of God at the heart of things, the truth of love at the heart of things. It is truth that insists upon a commitment to actual facts, of course. It also includes deeper realities of the soul. Jesus' truth helps us by insisting that we confront the lies of our age, and our own blind spots and excuses. Or, at bare minimum, Jesus' truth asks us to acknowledge that we *have* blind spots and do not know what we do not know. Truth requires that we examine our assumptions. Jesus' truth insists that we take a look at the places in our lives where we function by rote to such a degree that we regularly miss the wonder of each moment. Jesus' truth, opens our eyes, teaches us the meaning and implications of God's ways, and shows us how we are to honestly live in this world. Today take a moment to think about the freedom and healing power of the truth. We know that we live in a time that seems to choose lies over truth, that decides that lies really *are* truth. So how do we sort that all out? The easiest and most reliable way I know of when confronted with conflicting narratives, both external and internal, is to ask a couple of questions. Is this idea, narrative, belief, behavior, consistent with what we know of God revealed in Jesus Christ? Is it loving? Is it forgiving? Is it just? Is it redemptive? Does it support the common good? Or, is it exclusive, judgmental, mean spirited, violent, self-serving or based on prejudice? When we honestly ask those questions, it quickly becomes obvious where Truth is found. There is little more healing than that.

**Prayer:** Oh God of Healing Truth, open our eyes today to the deep truths of your way so that we may be your light in a world that is sometimes dim. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 10: The Healing Power of Confidence/Boldness** – Hebrews 13:6 *So we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?”*

When I was in grammar school, I remember one day being filled with energy and questions about the subject we were studying. I don't remember the subject now, although I am quite sure it wasn't math! I felt like I was bursting with questions and I kept asking follow up after follow up complete with my opinions appended. Finally, in exasperation, my teacher said, “Genie, you are going to have to learn to not be so bold or nobody will ever marry you.” Granted it was the 1960's in rural Alabama and marriage and homemaking was assumed to be the path that was apparently my end goal. Sadly, those words had an effect on me. I became much quieter in class and took to writing my questions down on paper rather than voicing them. It was not until the wild ride of college, in the wild ride of the 1970's, that I shed that cocoon and found the burgeoning liberation of my own voice, my own questions, and my own confidence. In today's verse we see that the writer of the last chapter of Hebrews urges us to live life in such a way, and with such depth of faith, that we can boldly, and with the confidence that faith nurtures, declare both the source of our confidence and the courage it inspires. In this passage, we see that the source of our confidence is living with integrity according the loving and just values of God. It is a confidence that will never fail us. Today think about the times when you feel confident to speak with your own voice. What makes that possible? Are there things that make it difficult? Are there any old wounds that need to heal for you to claim your voice with confidence? Think, as well, about times you feel bold to speak of your confidence in God? What makes that easy? Difficult? One of the most profound healings available to human beings is the discovery of our own voices as a result of a life-time dedicated to living with integrity relying on the help of God.

**Prayer:** God of Healing Grace, we thank you for your constant work to heal us and free us to be and speak with our own voice. We especially thank you for the confidence you give us to speak of our experiences with you! In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 11: The Healing Power of Starting Over** – John 3:7 *“Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’”*

One of the things that I love most about the beautiful passage in John's Gospel of Nicodemus sneaking in the night to see Jesus, from which today's verse is taken, is that Jesus tells the worldly powerful yet frightened man something

that we all need from time to time. “You really can start over from scratch (be born again.)” It can often feel like we are trapped in a net of consequences that result from a stream of often well-meaning but nonetheless broken choices. We can experience that in our physical being with thoughts like, “Why in the world do I stop for two scoops of ice-cream on the way home from the doctor’s office where I have just been told I need to lose weight?” Or, “It is too late for me to change the habits of a lifetime or the patterns of my relationships.” Or, “We are so far lost in our divisions and hatreds that it is too late for us.” Or any number of things that in one way or another tell us that it is too late for us, we cannot start over, we cannot weather change, much less experience transformation. When Jesus looks with love at Nicodemus who was too afraid of the consequences to be seen coming to Jesus’ house in broad daylight, Jesus immediately saw that this man needed to change. He needed to change just about everything. He needed to start over as a baby, learn and unlearn that which had left him broken and restless. Sometimes starting over from scratch, while certainly daunting, can be the only way forward into the healed life for which we long. Today, take a moment to think of areas in your life that you truly can’t continue to patch like a blown tire. Are there places where you need to just start over? Are there habits of thought that cannot take you forward anymore? Think about your early childhood. See if you can identify moments when you felt the wonder of all that you saw, as if for the first time. How might you recover the free eyes of a new born? What glasses do you need to remove to see with love and hope and joy again? That is at least in part, what Jesus means when he tells Nicodemus and us that we must be born again.

**Prayer:** God of Ever Surprising New Starts, help us today to start over fresh with you. Help us to remove the lens of pain or narrow certainty so we can see your face of love before us. In Jesus’ holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 12: The Healing Power of Never Giving Up** – *Mark 5:25-29* Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his cloak, I will be made well.” Immediately her flow of blood stopped, and she was healed of her disease.

Today I’d like us to return to the story we first considered on Day 5. On that day we focused on the amazing love of God that puts us back together again

whole. Today I'd like us to think for a bit about the healing power the woman demonstrates by never giving up on her life and the possibility that she could be cured. When she first says to herself "If I but touch his cloak, I will be **made well**," The Greek word used means to be saved thoroughly, cured, preserved, or rescued into wholeness. In the final sentence a different Greek word is translated 'healed of her disease.' (By the way, I love the literal translation of verse 29 'Immediately was dried up the fountain of the blood of her and she knew in her body that she has been cured of the terrible affliction.) The word used here is similar to the Hebrew word used throughout the Hebrew scriptures which means 'to mend thoroughly in order to usher in God's wholeness and peace (shalom.) This woman after years of torment, longs to be cured, rescued into wholeness. What is so profound to me is that she never gives up. After decades of pain and isolation (a woman was unclean when bleeding and could not eat with others, touch another person, or even sit on a chair or use a bowl that someone else might touch) and financial hardship, she somehow finds it possible to try again. What she gets as a result of her never giving up faith is something more profound and all-encompassing than the cure she initially sought. She was mended thoroughly in every way needed for God's wholeness and peace to define her life. But how was her faith demonstrated? It was demonstrated through a hope that never gave up, a hope that somehow Jesus had answers when no one and nothing else did, a hope that the merest touch of him could defy all odds and lead her to a life that was once again worth living. The healing is much deeper than the physical cure. Physical cures come and go when they come at all, but the powerful mending that Jesus offers to those who never give up hope is eternal. Are there areas of your life in which you are struggling to maintain hope? If so, close your eyes for a moment and imagine yourself on the dusty road in today's text. What are the obstacles to getting to Jesus? How can you navigate them? See yourself reaching out to him and see if you can, even for a moment, feel the fountain of pain dry up within you. Breathe deeply and trust that no matter what, he is mending you deeply.

**Prayer:** God of the Mending Heart, we thank you for the faith that you plant within us that allows us to harbor hope in all things. Help us today not to give up and to reach out to you for the mending we truly need. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 13: The Healing Power of Grief – Luke 19:41-42a** *As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!”*

Jesus is approaching the end of his physical life on earth. He has made his way to the Mount of Olives where he has instructed his disciples to go and get an unbroken colt for him to make his ‘triumphal’ entry into Jerusalem. As he approached the city, people threw their cloaks before him, the thing of greatest value that most owned. On the way he come to a bend where he first sees the city. There he stops and weeps. Things have not gone as he hoped. People have not listened to the core of his teaching. They have rushed from miracle to miracle and most have not been much changed by them. So he cries. He sobs. He laments that the people he came to reach have refused the message of peace, true and lasting wholeness. In that moment he sees what the result of the people’s refusal to see will be. He sees the destruction that lies ahead for them, and perhaps he also glimpses what that will mean for him. What touches me here is that he doesn’t rage. He doesn’t chastise. He doesn’t blame. No. He weeps. He grieves for his people lost in violence and seemingly immune to wide love and transformative justice. But something strange happens here. After his tears and lament, after his grief is spent for the moment, he heads to the temple with a fire and energy born out of the power of his grief. There he turns over the tables of injustice that had been normalized. Grief and lament are incredibly powerful and can be energizing forces that seek healing not just for the self but for others. The examples are endless, parents lose a child to cancer and form foundations to look for cures, parents lose a child to gun violence and become fierce advocates for change, a woman is a victim of domestic violence and somehow finds a way to create a safe house for other women and children. The problem comes when we are not allowed our grief, or are not able to withstand its painful journey. Then rather than a healing force, grief can become a life consuming force. There is much that we could say about grief. How different it is for every person, how it takes as long as it takes to rise from a blow. All of that and more is true. Today, though, take a moment to think of the healing power of grief. Jesus’ tears fueled his resolve. And yours can too, when the time is ripe. Are there losses you have not yet fully grieved? If so, ask yourself if now might be the right time for you to stop on your way and join Jesus as you look at what has happened. Perhaps now is the time for you to weep over what has been and what has not been. When you have done that enough, or as much as you can bear, like Jesus did, get back on your horse and do the next right thing. Notice

any shifts of energy in you as a result of your honest, Christ accompanied, lament.

**Prayer:** O God of Lament and Power, help us today to stop for a moment and face what is. If there is grief to lament, help us to feel your companionship in it. And when we are through for the moment, help us to go forward with energy and a measure of healing. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 14: The Healing Power of Remorse** – *Luke 15:18-19 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."*

One of the most damaging things in a human life is to believe that we never make mistakes nor need to repent and make amends. The belief that we are right about everything, and that any setbacks are invariably the fault of others, makes a soul sick indeed. It renders one blind to both reality, consequences, and deadens one to the leading of the Spirit and the power of forgiveness. Today's verses are taken from the beloved story of the Forgiving Father and the Prodigal Son. In short, it is the story of an immature younger son who chafes against life in his father's house, asks for his inheritance immediately and then goes out and makes a huge mess of his life. He hits bottom and decides that he would be better off going home, without status or expectation, and working as a servant in his father's house. Of course, he is welcomed with jaw dropping grace when he arrives. But first, he had to have the moment we consider today. He had to experience remorse. Remorse is largely the wake up moment when we feel sorry for what we have done and take responsibility for our actions. Repentance means to make a commitment to a change of life. To repent is to have a primal change of world view and to turn and go a different way as a result. Remorse can be a powerful motivator, but it is repentance that leads to long standing change. Perhaps the young man in this story is experiencing both of those dynamics at the same time. Clearly he is ashamed of his actions and knows that the life he has built is not sustainable. Something has got to give. Sometimes, making a decision, putting one foot on the road to making amends, is a powerful healing event in our lives. Can you think of a time when remorse and repentance had a healing effect on you? Is there anything for which you still need to repent, and find forgiveness today? As you ponder, remember that God is waiting with open arms to restore you in every possible way.

**Prayer:** Great God of Many Chances, help us today to see our fault clearly, to feel the sorrow that our actions naturally release. Help us then, to turn once more to your waiting arms and find solace and healing there. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 15: The Healing Power of Hospitality** – *Hebrews 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*”

I grew up in the American South where the notion of hospitality resonates deeply. In my early years I was taught how important it was to prepare for guests, to set a loving table, to create memories of care and welcome. One of my favorite aspects of pastoring was preparing meals in our home for small groups, committee meetings and large gatherings for fellowship and learning. I learned a lot from setting those tables and creating that welcome. I learned that it was a way of loving, a way of honoring and respecting my people. I learned that offering hospitality in my home often allowed people to shed burdens and experience a moment of warmth and safety. Once, my husband Robbie and I invited an indigenous couple over for dinner to get to know them better and plan how best to serve that community with sensitivity. I remember the husband seemed nervous when they arrived. Later, after dinner, he admitted that he had never been invited to the home of a “white person” before. The hospitality to strangers referred to in today’s text is both like and unlike what I just described. Biblical hospitality could obviously include setting a place and table and welcoming people into one’s home, but it was often a deeper commitment than that. Hospitality as used here means to create a safe space for strangers in which they are free to grow into all that God has dreamed for them to be. The ancestors believed that God would send strangers, in disguise, in order to test whether or not we lived what we claimed to believe. That belief lies behind the notion of entertaining angels unaware. To offer safety, warmth, sustenance and welcome is holy work indeed. It has the power to heal ancient wounds, if only for a moment. It has the power to heal misunderstandings both in those entertained and in us as hosts. In a world ravaged by division and vitriol, committing to true hospitality in our communities and churches can heal in ways that little else can do. Think today about times that you have experienced real safe welcome. How did that feel? What happened? Think about times that you have offered a safe space in which others can grow and heal. What was that like? Perhaps you will want to ask God today to find safe spaces for you. Perhaps you will want to ask how you might offer a safe place to someone else.

**Prayer:** O God of Unexpected Angels, help us today to find our places of true welcome and safety. And as we are welcomed and blossom in those places, help us to provide true hospitality to others in need. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 16: The Healing Power of Quiet** – *Psalm 46:10 Be still and know that I am God.*

Quiet is a rarity for many of us. Even those of us who live alone often have little self-chosen quiet. When we wake up we pick up our phones and enter into the often dis-quiet of messages, news and hurry. At bed time we often read the words of others, hearing them in our heads, or listen to music or watch old re-runs or YouTube videos until our eyelids can grow heavy and we can release into sleep. Even when there is little external stimuli, our minds often race from thought to thought to thought with few spaces to stop. There is nothing quiet about that, even if our ears are not filled with sounds. One of the great truths of the spiritual life is that it is in the quiet, the stopping of the stimuli, that we experience a most profound presence that reorients us, nourishes us, astounds us, heals us and connects us to the vast flow of divine love. It can be disorienting to enter, even briefly, into a profound spiritual silence. I remember the first time I went for a 24-hour silent retreat. I about jumped out of my skin pretty much the whole time. And yet, toward the end, there was a moment so startling, so rapturous, that I began to explore how to enter into silence more often. There is little more intimate than sitting with God, releasing our wild thoughts like tiny boats on a river, and finding between or beneath, or even along with those thoughts, a depth of wordless grace that, I believe, heals us on a soul level. To help with that, I often use today's verse as a portal. I begin by repeating the verse, silently or aloud, three times. Then I shorten the verse to 'be still and know that I am' three times. Then 'be still and know,' three times. Then 'be still' three times and finally 'Be' three times. At that point I release all words into the stillness. If I become preoccupied with thoughts, plans or worries, I, without judgment, simply return to the word 'Be.' And open up to the loving presence at the heart of the silence. Today, try this meditation process. You can begin with an intention if you like, or prayers of intercession or need. Just let go of your words at some point and enter into the process of stilling. See what happens and how you feel after.

**Prayer:** Great God of the Still Small Voice, help us today to find your presence in moments of holy silence. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 17: The Healing Power of the Moment** – *Esther 4:14b* – *Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.*

This morning I was talking with a friend who is grieving about a terminal illness of a beloved family member. It is, of course, a heartbreaking situation. In the course of that conversation, my friend said, "Something is not right with the universe." I have pondered that all morning. I think more than anything she was trying to describe the feeling that somehow, on a grand scale, things are not the way they should be, maybe not even the way God intended them to be. That was certainly the case in the story of Queen Esther. Esther was a beautiful young Jewish girl who later became Queen of the Persian Empire. From there she was in a position to save the Jewish people from annihilation in a vast act of ethnic cleansing. Her story of deliverance of the people is celebrated in the annual feast of Purim. The main point of the story, it seems to me, is that God's providential care is at work in any and all situations as dire as they may be. Today's verse comes at the point where Esther's cousin, the wise Mordecai finds out what the king is plotting and goes to Esther hoping she will intervene. He sees her fear and initial reluctance and tells her, in essence that she was born for this moment. What was true for Esther is true for each and every moment. When we are faced with hardship, when the world seems to spin apart, when the universe appears to wobble, it is still true: we were each born for this moment. We can find the courage to meet it, if we choose. We can even find the faith in many ways to change the course of events. Granted, we can rarely cure a terminal illness in a loved one. Nor can we singlehandedly prevent atrocities like Esther was able to do. But we can do what we were created and placed on earth to do in every given moment. We can summon courage. We can offer love. And sometimes we can do what we cannot even imagine being able to do. Are there areas in your life that feel totally overwhelming and destructive today? How might God desire to use you in this moment? Ask God for help and discernment so that you can hear a clear calling and not just the siren song of ego.

**Prayer:** Great God of Every Moment, help us today to meet our moment with faith and courage so that we can do today what you need of us. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 18: The Healing Power of Water** – *Acts 8:36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?”*

The story of the apostle Philip’s encounter on the road with an Ethiopian eunuch is filled with drama and pathos. The man, a stranger and considered outcast, is sitting in his chariot puzzling over a reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip is wakened from sleep and, without knowing why, is sent to the place where the Ethiopian is. Their ensuing conversation is so God spangled that the Ethiopian sees water and asks that he be allowed to declare his faith and be baptized right then and there. Water is a potent symbol and conduit for healing, purification and wellness in the Bible. When I was a child, my parents signed me up for swimming lessons. I loved going to the pool but I was afraid to put my face in the water. I since learned that that is common to many asthmatics such as myself. I remember crouching on the edge unable to do that little curl and fall into the water. It was not until my teacher got into the water just in front of me that I was able to screw up the courage to fall into the deep end. Accompaniment is everything, isn’t it? Philip was there to accompany the Ethiopian into his headlong dive into the deep waters of a new faith story. Just as God is with us when we tumble into the healing waters of baptism or the deep end of any other decision we must make. Water changes things. It cleanses. It nourishes. It gives life. On average 60% of our bodies is made up of water while about 70% of the earth is made up of water. Today, if you can, take a cup or glass of clean water and place it on your desk or somewhere in your home. Each time you glance at it, or pass by it, dip your fingers in the water. Thank God for water and for the healing power at the heart of your baptism. Splash droplets on your face. Think of what needs to be cleansed, nourished and restored in you and know that God is at work in those areas and accompanies you in every moment.

**Prayer:** God of Cleansing Waters, help us today to experience the power of water. Work with us to restore clean water to those who lack it and help us to give thanks for the power of our baptism. In Jesus’ holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 19: The Healing Power of Breath** – *John 20:22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”*

Jesus’ life on earth has drawn to a close. His friends and family members are bent double with grief and fear. Those who had the courage to stand by him to the end and those who could not bear it, are gathering now behind locked doors. They have no idea what to do next. They are filled with fear for their

own futures and doubt about what Jesus has taught them. Where was the promised revolution? Where was the bounty and safety of the new realm? Where was the comfort in the grief? Where was the one who said he would not leave them comfortless? Nowhere that their eyes could see. All they felt they had left was grief and a flimsy locked door. But, as always with Jesus, the truth was much larger than their experience and expectation. It was larger than their grief and fear. So as they cower, Jesus walks through the locked door, greets them, identifies himself to them, gives them a command to continue his mission and offers them a gift to help them: the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is lovely to me that Jesus *breathes* the spirit upon them. After all, the words for Spirit in both Hebrew and Greek mean spirit, wind and breath. We see in this tiny passage that the breath/Spirit of God addresses grief and fear with meaning, intimacy and purpose. Each breath we take can do the same thing for us if we approach it with grateful awareness. As a person with life long lung issues, I am keenly aware of the healing power of a good deep breath. I am also awed that whether we are aware of it or not, each breath we take is a powerful experience of Spirit. When we take a mindful breath we breath in Spirit's healing presence and release that which causes us pain or harm. Prayerful breathing calms and reorients us. It settles our bodies and souls. It lowers anxiety and offers a salve for fear and pain. So today I invite you to pause often and pray with your breathing. I usually breath in for a count of four and out for a count of six focusing on the presence of God with me keeping me connected and alive. Take about 8 breathing prayers several times a day and see what happens.

**Prayer:** God of Our Every Breath, help us today to be mindful of your Spirit, to breathe deeply of your love and to release any fears of hurts we no longer wish to carry so that we can be about the work that you have for us to do. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 20: The Healing Power of Nature** – *Job 12:7-8* “*But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the sky, they will tell you; or speak to the earth and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you.*”

The book of Job can be tough sledding for the empaths among us. Here is a good and decent man who is afflicted in every awful way imaginable. Rather than simply a book about why bad things happen to good people, it seems to me that Job is a book that helps us wrestle with what it takes to hold on to faith in times of loss and injustice. At the point that we find today's verse, Job's friend has just had a very unhelpful conversation with him and Job is having

none of it. He begins chapter 12 by wailing that his troubles have left him a laughingstock in the community and that his friends' judge-y advice just adds to his pain. Then, as if grabbing for a handhold while slipping down a mountain, he grasps on the beauty and powerful intuition of nature as a more reliable glimpse into the heart of goodness than his friends and the leaders of his community. He claims that looking at the animals will reveal to all that God exists and what God is doing. His point is that even in horrendous conditions God has to be up to something ultimately wise and life giving. I know that all of you are likely not animal lovers like I am. Still, I daily find grace, wisdom and even peace by observing the sea birds on our canal, the porpoises in the Gulf or the woodpeckers in the trees. More than all, though, our dog Bonnie teaches me each day about devotion, staying in the moment, faithfulness, wild joy and sweet comfort. When she is on my lap, sighs deeply and releases herself completely to my presence, it is a reminder of how I am to be with God. So today, look around you. Notice the patterns of the leaves on trees, the movement of waters, the way the fur lies on your dog's coat, the industry of the bees taking the last possible touch of pollen before winter. Notice the butterfly wings and remember that each movement has an impact on everything on the planet. Praise God for the guidance at the heart of the created order and relax into the wisdom that is around you and within you at all times.

**Prayer:** O God of Every Creature, help us today to seek the wisdom of creation and to find in it both solace and guidance for the days in which we live. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 21: The Healing Power of a Vision** - *Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no prophecy (vision) the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law.*

For many years I led what I called Visioning retreats for groups, congregations and other organizations that wanted to refocus on their purpose and develop a compelling picture of where they felt led to go. Sometimes those compelling visions arose as a result of a strategic discernment process. Other times, they arose from the powerful articulation of one or two leaders who inspired others to see what they saw. Sometimes those visions resulted in profound change. Other times they were filed away and nothing much changed at all. Sometimes the Spirit worked through a deliberate orderly process. Other times something happened that lit everything on fire, burning away what was no longer useful and warming and enlivening an unexpected and inescapable

new reality. However, it happened and whatever the result, it was clear that individuals and groups who found a mutually agreed upon purpose that was motivating to them, found a way to live fully and with meaning. The wisdom writer of Proverbs understood how important an organizing image or vision can be for the life of individuals and faith communities. In its context the word 'vision' refers to a passionate prophetic vision; that is a compelling understanding of God's values motivating and molding community itself. Often the life or death of a person, or organization, comes down to whether or not the individuals believe that there is something meaningful yet for them to do. Take a moment today to think about your personal vision. How do you feel led to embody God's values in a specific way today? If you find that you are more consumed by your to-do list than motivated by your mission, stop for a moment and pray today's prayer aloud. Watch how God finds ways to speak to you directly about the purpose of this day.

**Prayer:** God of Powerful Vision, show me what is mine to do today so that I may further your purposes and live with joy and meaning. In Jesus' holy name I pray. Amen.

**Day 22: The Healing Power of Exorcism** – *Mark 1:27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."*

In worship classes in seminary I was taught, liturgically, how to do an exorcism. I remember when we got to that day, all of us were uncomfortable. Some maybe a little too excited. Even our professor did not seem quite his usual peaceful self. Before he showed us the traditional process and prayers for this work, he said, "Whatever you do, be careful with this. Consider yourself blessed if you never have to think about this again for your entire ministry. And never, never, never, attempt something like this alone. You are not as strong and invulnerable as you think you are." We were all a little awed and chastened, took notes and hoped to turn the page on that part of our spiritual heritage. Jesus had no such luxury. Exorcisms were common place in his day and both humble and unscrupulous exorcists abounded with their formulas for healing. The image of red tailed demons or Hollywood exorcisms, however, was not a part of that world. In those days a demon was understood to be any power, force, habit or process that had the power to divert a person from the life of promised blessing for which each is intended. Evil was never defined. Rather it was labeled so by its results. Gradually a litmus test was developed with three questions to help one discern evil. Something was

considered evil if it made faith difficult, obscured the glory of God, or made it difficult to praise God. All manner of things falls into those categories. Everything from what we would call mental illness today, to addictions, to mindless cruelty, to chronic diseases, corrupt systems could be labeled demonic or evil and were subject to exorcism. An exorcism, in general is a prayer for evil to depart and the light of God to take its place. Today, take a moment to reflect on any powers, forces, habits or processes that make it hard for you to praise God. Are there habits or ways of thinking that, when acted upon, make God look bad? Are there powerful forces or habits that make it hard for you to praise God? What are those things? Are they new to your life or long standing issues? Whatever the case, in prayer, ask God to surround you with protection and healing love. Ask for the help that only God can give you. See if you can imagine the grip of the thing loosening and the old hurt places filled with divine light. Be gentle with yourself here. Skip over this if you are afraid or ask a trust friend or pastor to pray with you to reassure you that you are safe and that Christ has the authority to replace pain with hope.

**Prayer:** God of Light, help us today to examine those habits or behaviors that damage us and others. Give us courage and safety to release them so that we can be filled with your loving light. In Jesus' holy name we pray.

**Day 23: The Healing Power of Hope** – *Romans 8:24-25 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

The word that Paul uses here that we translate hope refers to the happy and confident expectation of a good outcome or future. This hope is independent of circumstances and often provides the needed energy to traverse a difficulty or hardship. It is not a wish. It is the confident expectation that God is at all times good and working for the good for all of God's children. Because our hope is rooted in God and a belief in eternity, there is never a time in which hope is not warranted even though there may be many circumstances in which we cannot access the *feeling* of hope and rather, feel overwhelmed by despair. Even in those times, hope is alive and at work in us until we can gain strength enough to pick it up again. This morning in a meeting that included colleagues from areas devastated by recent hurricanes, a friend talked about the wily ways that hope bubbles up in times of devastation and grief. She talked about the hope she finds in companions on the journey, the hope she finds in the resiliency of the earth and communities of people. She talked about the hope of coming to the realization that life will never be the same

again, but that beauty and goodness always emerge in their time. There is something healing about starting over and imagining a new and good future and outcome. Can you do that today? Are there areas of your life in which you find hope difficult? If so, can you imagine a good outcome? Who can help you? How can you experience the presence of the living God of hope giving you guidance and strengthening your ability to be patient? Today, for just a moment, can you hope for what you do not see?

**Prayer:** God of Hope, fill us today with a renewed trust in your goodness and presence so that we can face today's challenges with hope and love. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 24: The Healing Power of Angels** – *Genesis 32:24 Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until day break.*

This glorious story of our ancestor Jacob wrestling all night with an angel gives us a clear picture of the processes of the spiritual life. In the Hebrew scriptures, the word we translate as angel refers to someone sent from a great distance in order to communicate a message. Angels were sometimes supernatural beings, and other times human beings conscripted by God as messengers and carriers of divine power or instruction. In today's passage the wrestler is called a man and later referred to as God. In whatever form the 'angel' appeared, the message was clearly from God. Jacob was in a terrible mess. He had lied and cheated to get ahead his whole life and now it looked like he was about to face the consequences. He was afraid, and when he laid down to sleep it all came to a head. Things had to change. God knew that some things needed to be wrestled into Jacob and some things needed to be wrestled out of him for him to move forward and become the healing force God intended for him to be. That is true for each of us. There are habits of thought and action that block our fullness of life and they must go. There are also habits of thought and action that need to be deeply embedded in our lives for us to move forward. God will use whatever messengers that can get our attention in this holy work. They may be angels in the traditional sense, people who love us and tell us the truth, powerful experiences of prayer or even the Spirit insights from a daily encounter with nature. However, they come, angels have only one purpose. Their purpose is to help us grow in love and spiritual destiny. Today think for a moment about your experiences with messengers of God. How have you recognized a holy message in the past? Are there places or circumstances that make it easier for you to become aware of your 'angels?' If you have not had these kinds of experiences, ask God to

awaken you to those sent to help you. Welcome them and trust that they seek only your good and can do nothing apart from the will of God. Open your heart and see what happens.

**Prayer:** Great God, we thank you for the many messengers you send to us on a daily basis to help us grow and heal. Open our hearts today to receive these gifts even if, or especially if, their message is one that we must wrestle with to receive. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 25: The Healing Power of Joy....***Psalm 30:5 For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*

The longer I live the more aware I become aware that joy is a revolutionary act. Words that we translate as joy in the Bible can mean anything from calm delight to wild hilarity and everything in between. Joy is an experience that bubbles up from the soul when we become convinced that God and life are good regardless of our circumstances. Joy is rooted in our belief that God's love is always present and at work. It is independent of circumstances because it rests on our knowing that we are already living in eternity and moving on an unending path with more and more joy each day. Like a snowball gains girth rolling down hill, God's joy in use just gets bigger with time, even if it must cover obstacles that we wish were not there. Joy that settles the soul in quiet delight can change our moods almost instantly. Joy often arrives when something wonderful pierces our fear. When joy erupts into laughter it can connect us with a bigger picture and release unnoticed healing grace. Joy is never pointed or at the expense of others. Rather joy breaks down divisions and allows people to experience body life as a deeper unity. If I have days when I feel down or sick, I make it a point to pray joy and to take time to tune into things that never fail to make me laugh. When I do that, I usually find that joy rises and brings with it needed energy and confident hope. Today make an appointment with yourself for joy. Think about all the things that make you smile. Relive in your mind moments of humor and grace. Watch a show or video clip that makes you laugh. Feel the laughter not just in your mind but in your whole body. As you do that, I suspect, you will find that joy not only comes in the morning, but it comes anytime we make room for it.

**Prayer:** O God of Joy, we thank you for the healing power of joy. Open us today to the experiences of joy you have for us so that we can be agents of joy in our lives and world. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 26: The Healing Power of Goodness** – *Romans 15:14 – I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.*

The word that Paul uses in today's verse that we translate as goodness is one he uses a number of places in his writing, including in his list of the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. This kind of goodness is both morally righteous and exquisitely active. It refers to goodness that makes things happen. It is Christlike character that takes God's values to the streets. This type of goodness is never violent but is zealous for truth, justice, equity and shared compassion. It is the kind of goodness that the late civil rights icon, Rep. John Lewis talked about when he urged people to get into 'good trouble.' Goodness always works for the common good, seeks to eliminate obstacles to the fullness of life and erases all notion of anyone as an enemy. In my view, it is not a natural characteristic for most of us. Rather, it is a work of God's healing Spirit within and through us. Spirit goodness is lavish, bold and never expects repayment of any kind. In today's verse Paul equates this kind of plentiful goodness, along with knowledge, as the ingredients necessary for both withstanding hardship and teaching others. Getting on our feet for goodness and out of a deep well of goodness, has a dramatic healing effect. Are there things that are weighing you down, things about which you are despairing? What is one good thing that you can do to address those issues? Getting up off the couch and doing something actively to alleviate others' pain or injustice not only helps to change their lives for the better. It is guaranteed to change your own as well.

**Prayer:** Good God, help us today to act for the common good in small or large ways as you guide us. Heal us of the lie of helplessness and use us to take your goodness to the streets. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 27: The Healing Power of Decency** – *Matthew 7:12 In everything do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

The sturdy thread of loving neighbor and refusing to do them harm runs through the entire moral law of Judaism and Christianity. The Ten Commandments call for an ethic of decency in which we always choose the

good of the other. We refuse to harm, exploit, steal from, kill, cheat, lie to, or covet their things and lives in such a way that we make them easy prey for our out of bounds desires. In his extended teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that treating each other as we would want to be treated is the heart of all the teachings in the law and the prophets. It is also at the heart of all his teaching. A few days ago I was talking with a friend I had not seen since college days. It was a wonderful nostalgic conversation filled with vivid memories that both felt like yesterday and like a life on another planet. At one lull in the conversation, she asked me, "What do you miss most?" Without even thinking, from some place primal in me, I answered with just one word. "Decency." And we both began to cry. There is a terrible meanness that has been normalized in our country these days. It is an indecency that arises from dehumanizing those with whom we disagree. It arises from the unhealed wounds of our broken egos that tell us that we will be ok if someone else can be blamed or seen as less worthy than we. It arises from an ends justify the means ethic. It arises from the breakdown of a vision of the common good and the basic dignity of every creature. Jesus knew that his purposes would be constantly thwarted if we could not learn that simple lesson. Others matter as much as we do, and, as God's people, we are never to treat anyone in a way that we would not want to be treated ourselves. There is no legitimate wiggle room there. Today, think of moments when you were aware that someone treated you with dignity and decency. How did that make you feel? Are there people or situations in which you see a pervading 'indecency?' How might you respond to that without adding to the indecency? When you take on the practice of holy decency, old wounds begin to heal both in you and in the world.

**Prayer:** God of Love, help us today to see your image in every person. Help us to treat all with dignity and decency. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 28: The Healing Power of Rest** – *Deut. 5:12-14 Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slaves may rest as well as you.*

“I am just so exhausted,” my new friend said this morning as we sat on my front porch in the lovely crisp fall air. “What’s going on?” I asked. “It’s the world we live in. I am anxious all the time. Politics, wars, family struggles, my husband’s health. I feel like if I even stop to breathe something bad will happen. Sometimes I just sit and stare. I don’t know where to put my oar in the water anymore.” Perhaps you can identify. Earlier this month, we considered the healing power of sabbath itself, stopping, ceasing, making space for God. What I have come to realize is that not all stopping is the same. Not all stopping actually provides the physical, emotional and spiritual healing of true rest. One of the things that I find touching about the Biblical teaching of sabbath rest is that it begins a week rather than ends it. Just as days in the Hebrew reckoning begin at sunset, everything life giving starts with rest, with laying down burdens and allowing oneself to be restored without effort by the pure grace of God’s restorative will. Stopping and resting is no easy feat. We are constantly bombarded with information, requests, shoulds and oughts. A lot of what bombards us really matters to us. We know that the dog needs a walk, the child needs a lift to soccer practice, our checkbook needs balancing and our spouses would love 5 minutes of uninterrupted attention. Sometimes a nap or even a good night’s sleep doesn’t restore us as we hoped. There are a lot of reasons for that. One thing I have noticed that prevents me from truly stopping to rest is that I convince myself, insanely, that more responsibility lies on my shoulders than actually does. Recently family and health problems had me so agitated that I could not rest no matter how hard I tried. I couldn’t even pray for rest, that is how exhausted I had become. One night as I lay in the dark listening to my husband’s easy breathing, I began to try to pray the Lord’s Prayer. I got as far as “Our Father.” Suddenly a powerful sense of both provision and unity flowed through me like water. I knew that I was neither alone nor the only one God had to work with in any situation even the most personal ones. That night I experienced true rest and the next day the world looked quite different. Do you ever struggle to find true rest? Perhaps stopping and simply praying Our Father with your breathing may help you too. Try it and see what happens.

**Prayer:** O God of Healing Rest, today we place ourselves in your hands. Give us the wonderful rush of rest that comes from knowing who we are and whose. In Jesus’ holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 29: The Healing Power of Enough** – *Exodus 20:17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife; male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

Covetousness is a tricky one. It doesn't simply refer to desire for something like a new car or a bells and whistles phone. There is nothing wrong with desire in an of itself, especially if we are in difficult circumstances and the desire to better ourselves gives us focus and energy. Covetousness is not that. It is, rather, a predatory desire for something, or even just something else, that takes over our thoughts and makes it difficult for us to be grateful and enjoy that which we already have. At its heart to covet is to long for another life, an imagined one that we airbrush to suit our dreams, especially if we think we see that life in somebody else. When we covet it is not long before the lines between what we want and what we are willing to do to others to get what we want, blur and we find that we are capable of great evil or harm that we justify as means to an end. Taken to its logical conclusion, when we covet we reject the life we have and, to an extent, the self that has built that life and the Source that has given us that life. This kind of restless desiring is a robber and like a virus it can infect every part of our lives leaving us heartsick and morally handicapped. Do you ever find that your desire for something or someone leaves you dissatisfied with your life and unable to find blessing in what is? Do you ever find that you spend energy chasing the next shiny object and then have little left for those you love or for deepening your own spiritual life? If so check to see if covetousness has crept into your soul and is making too many of your decisions. If so, I suggest starting a gratitude journal or getting a jar or vase that you fill with stones or marbles each time you think of something wonderful about the moment in which you live right now. That jar will become a sculpture of grace that you can see each day. See if, over time, it begins to change not only your emotions but your priorities as well.

**Prayer:** Great God of Enough, we thank you for the gift of this day, for the healing power of our breath, for the beauty of creation, for all that is good. We thank you for bringing us to this moment and we entrust the next ones to you. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

**Day 30: The Healing Power of Helping** – *Luke 10:25-37 "Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

Today's short verse comes at the end of one of the best known and most beloved of Jesus' parables, the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this story a teacher of the law asks Jesus the traditional question, "What must I do to

inherit eternal life?" Most scholars believe that this was not a sincere question but, rather, an attempt to trap Jesus into saying something that would turn his followers away or have him arrested. After Jesus gives the usual answer, that a person must love God with all of one's self and love neighbor as self, the lawyer asks Jesus who is included in the word neighbor. So Jesus tells the story of a man traveling on a road who was mugged, robbed and left for dead. Two powerful religious leaders see him and pass by him on the other side. But a Samaritan, the most hated group for pious Jews of the time, sees the situation, stops to help, binds the man's wounds and takes him to a hotel where he pays for his care. After telling the story, Jesus asks the lawyer who had behaved as neighbor to the wounded man. He was forced to admit that the Samaritan had done so. Then Jesus says, "Go and do likewise." Do you think that Jesus was trying to shame the lawyer? I don't. I think he was trying to heal him. There is little as powerfully healing as stepping outside of our comfort zones and prejudices to see others as fully human and offering the care we can to them. Today, ask yourself if there are those upon whom you have turned your back that you could offer tender care. Why do you turn away? Might there be ways that you can begin to turn back to those you may not like, agree with, or even see as enemy? Try in a small way today and see what happens.

**Prayer:** God of All People, help us today to see your children in need apart from any labels we are accustomed to applying to them. How can we help others in your name? In Jesus holy name we pray. Amen.