

⊕ LIVING COMPASS

Living Well Through Lent 2020



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

A Living Compass Seasonal Resource

Courage is a heart word. The root of the word courage is cor—the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage meant “To speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart.” Over time, this definition has changed, and today, we typically associate courage with heroic and brave deeds. But in my opinion, this definition fails to recognize the inner strength and level of commitment required for us to actually speak honestly and openly about who we are and about our experiences—good and bad. Speaking from our hearts is what I think of as “ordinary courage.”

—Brené Brown

Are there others with whom you might want to share the Lenten journey through this devotional booklet? Following are two additional ways you, and others, can deepen your experience of Lent. Visit us at LivingCompass.org/Lent to learn more or to sign up.

Living Well Through Lent 2020

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Join Our Lent Facebook Group * Sign up for Daily Emails in Lent

1. We would like to invite you to join our Lent Facebook discussion group. If you participate in this private group, you will be enriched by your interactions with hundreds of others who are also reading this devotional.
2. We also are offering an opportunity for you to have the reflections from this devotional emailed to you each day during Lent.

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



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About the Writers

The Very Rev. Dominic Barrington has served as Dean of St. James Cathedral in Chicago since 2015, after twenty years of parish and campus ministry in the Church of England. He is married to Alison, a music therapist, and Director of Children’s Ministry at St. James, and they have two young boys. Dominic has made a specialty of the ministry of pilgrimage, and is an acclaimed leader of such trips in the Holy Land and in his native Britain. In his spare time he is often to be found in the kitchen or around the dining table enjoying good food and wine, or delighting in the world-class performances of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.



The Rev. Theodora Nmade Brooks was born in Liberia, West Africa, where she was ordained to the Diaconate and Priesthood by The Most Rev. George Daniel Browne, Archbishop of the Province of West Africa and Bishop of the Diocese of Liberia. She was the first woman ordained in the Anglican Province of West Africa! In addition to parish ministry, she worked on the Archbishop’s staff. She is the Priest in Charge of St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church in the Longwood Community of the South Bronx and also serves the Church on the diocesan and national levels. Rev. Brooks is the mother of two sons, a pastor, a runner, and a community builder.





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



Anna Fitch Courie is an Army wife, nurse, college instructor, and author of multiple titles on health, wellness, and spirituality. Her titles include: *Christ Walk: A 40 Day Spiritual Fitness Program* (2015); *Christ Walk Kids* (2016); *Sally the Comet* (2015); *Sally and the Constellations* (2017); *The Adventures of Cancer Girl and God* (2018); *Christ Walk Crushed* (2020); and *When Sally met Halley* (TBD). Anna keeps busy as mom to Patton and Merryn (her human children), and KaiLani (her four-legged furball). When not working, she enjoys spending time with her husband, Treb, hiking, traveling, playing board games, reading, and attending as many Clemson football games as possible. Home is wherever the Army (and God) sends her.



The Rev. Jenifer Gamber serves as Associate Rector and Day School Chaplain at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, where she shares her love for Jesus and invites all people to life in Christ. Mother of two adult children, Jenifer and her husband, Ed, share a home with a feisty West Highland Terrier. In her free time she leads evensong at the National Cathedral, reads, and walks city streets in search of friendly dog parks.



ABOUT THE WRITERS

The Rev. Heidi Haverkamp is the author of two books: *Advent in Narnia: Reflections for the Season* (2015) and *Holy Solitude: Lenten Reflections with Saints, Hermits, Prophets, and Rebels* (2017). For ten years, she served in parish ministry in churches in Chicago and Bolingbrook, Illinois. She is an oblate (associate) of Holy Wisdom Monastery in Wisconsin, a small, ecumenical monastic community for women. She and her husband, Adam Frieberg, live in DeKalb, Illinois, with a beagle and two cats in a house they renovated. She enjoys reading multiple books at once, living in a big, diverse, Midwestern university town, cooking dinner, and staring out the window.



The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski is an Episcopal priest and licensed marriage and family therapist practicing in the greater North Shore area of Milwaukee and Mequon. Jan and Dennis have been married for 39 years. Between the families of their four adult sons, they are blessed with eight grandchildren who are the absolute joys of their lives. Dancing and performing in parades with the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies, knitting, and sipping almond milk lattes are also a source of life and joy for Jan.





The Rt. Rev. Samuel Rodman serves as the twelfth Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. Prior to his election in 2017, Bishop Rodman served as the Special Projects Officer for the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, a role he took on after spending five years as the diocesan project manager for campaign initiatives where he engaged congregations, clergy, and laity, in collaborative local and global mission through the *Together Now* campaign. Prior to that, he spent 16 years as the rector of St. Michael's in Milton, Massachusetts. He and his wife of 32 years, Deborah, live in Raleigh, North Carolina, and are the parents of two adult daughters. In his free time, Bishop Rodman enjoys basketball, golf, kayaking, crosswords, and creative writing.



The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner—founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative—has served his community for more than 30 years as an Episcopal priest, retreat leader, spiritual director, and author. In addition to his coaching and psychotherapy work, he leads wellness retreats for organizations and leadership teams. Scott has been married to Holly Hughes Stoner for 40 years and together they are the co-creators of *The Teen Compass* and the *Parent Wellness Compass*. In his free time, Scott loves cycling, running, and soccer, and spending time with family.



The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

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

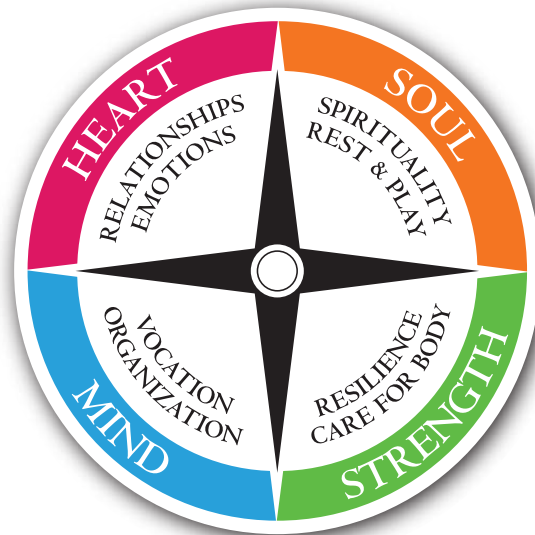
—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

Living Compass provides tools and trainings to assist individuals, families, and congregations as they seek to live the life God calls them to in all areas of life—heart, soul, strength, and mind. We use these as our four compass points to help guide and equip us in eight areas of wellness.

Areas of Wellness

Heart

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



The Living Compass

Soul

- **Spirituality.** The ability to develop and practice a strong personal value system, and to discover a meaningful purpose in life.
- **Rest and Play.** The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.



Strength

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

Mind

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

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

Trainings

Living Compass regularly offers trainings in how to use our resources for adults, teens, parents, and families. We offer Community Wellness Advocate trainings at the Nicholas Center in Chicago, as well as around the country for larger groups. We also offer specialized trainings that focus on parent and teen wellness ministries. Contact us if you are interested in attending or hosting a training. Wellness ministries create deeper connections within a faith community, which helps that community create deeper connections with its surrounding neighbors.

Introduction


Lent is a time for introspection and self-reflection, a time to reflect on the core of what it means to live a Christian life in the midst of great change and uncertainty. When facing change and uncertainty, few practices are more central to that life than courage—the courage to be vulnerable, the courage to grow, the courage to change direction, the courage to let go, the courage to act with grace, and the courage to walk the way of love.

We are delighted that you have chosen to use our 2020 Lenten devotional as a tool to assist you on your own journey. And we are honored to have eight featured writers to help us reflect on this year's theme of *Practicing Courage with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*. Their diverse and rich voices encourage us to understand that in order to prepare for the new life of Easter, we need to be intentional about discerning what it truly means to practice courage with our whole being.

As important as are the daily readings in this devotional, even more significant will be the reflections and insights that emerge in response to the readings. We encourage you to record them, either in the spaces provided, or in a separate journal. When possible, join or start a group where you can discuss your thoughts with others. Our Facilitator Guide provides guidance on how to use this devotional in a small group.

I would also like to invite you to join our Lenten Facebook discussion group. If you participate in this private group, you will be enriched by your interactions with hundreds of others who are also reading this devotional. We also are offering an opportunity to have the reflections from this devotional emailed to you each day during Lent. See the inside front cover for more information.

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



The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner
Director, Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness
Ministry Initiative

Ways To Use *Living Well Through Lent 2020* *A Personal Devotional and a Lenten Program*

This 2020 devotional is intended to be used for daily personal reflection as we journey through Lent. We begin each Sunday with a reflection written by one of our featured writers. Every other day of the week begins with a Scripture or quote, followed by a reflection, and then an invitation for you to record any thoughts, feelings, or insights. If you are reading this on an eReader, we encourage you to purchase a journal to use with this devotional.

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

We are excited to offer two additional options for engaging this devotional. The reflections will be available as a daily email that you can subscribe to, and we will be hosting an online Lenten discussion group based on this resource during Lent on Facebook. You can learn more about both of these resource offerings on our website: LivingCompass.org/Lent.

The devotional is also perfect as a resource for a half- or full-day Lenten retreat (more on this in the Lent Facilitator Guide). The daily readings could serve as the reflection, or as starting points for reflections offered by the retreat leader. Following each reflection, participants could record their responses, either in the devotional, or in a separate journal. Giving each person a copy of this devotional would ensure that the experience of the retreat would stay with them throughout the remainder of Lent.

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



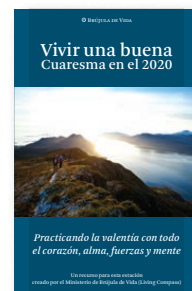
Facilitator Guide

The Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Lent 2020

| Lent Year A | First reading | Psalm | Second reading | Gospel |
|---|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Ash Wednesday February 26, 2020 | Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 OR Isaiah 58:1-12 | Psalm 51:1-17 | 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 | Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 |
| First Sunday in Lent March 1, 2020 | Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 | Psalm 32 | Romans 5:12-19 | Matthew 4:1-11 |
| Second Sunday in Lent March 8, 2020 | Genesis 12:1-4a | Psalm 121 | Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 | John 3:1-17 OR Matthew 17:1-9 |
| Third Sunday in Lent March 15, 2020 | Exodus 17:1-7 | Psalm 95 | Romans 5:1-11 | John 4:5-42 |
| Fourth Sunday in Lent March 22, 2020 | 1 Samuel 16:1-13 | Psalm 23 | Ephesians 5:8-14 | John 9:1-41 |
| Annunciation of the Lord March 25, 2020 | Isaiah 7:10-14 | Psalm 45 OR Psalm 40:5-10 | Hebrews 10:4-10 | Luke 1:26-38 |
| Fifth Sunday in Lent March 29, 2020 | Ezekiel 37:1-14 | Psalm 130 | Romans 8:6-11 | John 11:1-45 |
| Liturgy of the Palms April 5, 2020 Sixth Sunday in Lent | | Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 | Matthew 21:1-11 | |
| Liturgy of the Passion April 5, 2020 Sixth Sunday in Lent | Isaiah 50:4-9a | Psalm 31:9-16 | Philippians 2:5-11 | Matthew 26:14-27:66 OR Matthew 27:11-54 |

| Holy Week Year A | First reading | Psalm | Second reading | Gospel |
|--|--|----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Monday of Holy Week April 6, 2020 | Isaiah 42:1-9 | Psalm 36:5-11 | Hebrews 9:11-15 | John 12:1-11 |
| Tuesday of Holy Week April 7, 2020 | Isaiah 49:1-7 | Psalm 71:1-14 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | John 12:20-36 |
| Wednesday of Holy Week April 8, 2020 | Isaiah 50:4-9a | Psalm 70 | Hebrews 12:1-3 | John 13:21-32 |
| Mundy Thursday April 9, 2020 Holy Thursday | Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14 | Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 | 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 | John 13:1-17, 31b-35 |
| Good Friday April 10, 2020 | Isaiah 52:13-53:12 | Psalm 22 | Hebrews 10:16-25 OR Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9 | John 18:1-19:42 |
| Holy Saturday April 11, 2020 | Job 14:1-14 OR Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24 | Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16 | 1 Peter 4:1-8 | Matthew 27:57-66 OR John 19:38-42 |

Living Compass has also published, *Vivir una buena Cuaresma en el 2020: Practicando la valentía con todo el corazón, alma, fuerzas y mente*—a Spanish Lenten devotional with completely original content. To learn more or to order, visit livingcompass.org. Questions? Contact us: info@livingcompass.org.



Ash Wednesday

February 26, 2020

Daily Acts of Courage

by The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski

Working with individuals and families as a hospice chaplain was one of the happiest times in my professional life. When I make this statement, I'd say 95% of people look at me quizzically and ask how I could do that work. They'd especially ask that when I was taking care of a dying infant, child, or teen and their families. Looking back, I realize that I have learned more than I thought I had about faithful courageous living from the dying.

I used to think of courage as BIG, BOLD ACTION, like a firefighter running into a burning building. And, of course, these actions take courage. From my hospice families and colleagues, I learned about a different kind of courage. A kind of courage that shows up in the small, specific choices we make every day of our lives. A kind of courage that shows up and is present in the big and little, joyful and agonizing, moments of everyday life.

What I came to understand is that as people of faith we live life on a continuum between fear and courage. I learned that those who live life from a stance of courage move toward the end of life in a completely different way than those who live from a stance of fear. Courageous decisions about health, time, relationships, repairing relationships, boundaries, self-care, or work made throughout life's journey increase not only their capacity to love themselves, but also the capacity to love everyone around them. Fear-based choices have the opposite effect. I learned that living faithfully and courageously is a lifelong spiritual practice.

Most of us are probably not going to be performing frequent big, bold acts of courage, but each of us is called to the bold, daily action of loving God and each other with our whole selves. We are called to let our most protected selves be vulnerable to God's transforming love. We are called to increase the strength of our ability to respond in love. We are called to learn, to listen, and perhaps to change our minds about what we think we



Thursday, February 27, 2020

The Purpose of Practice

by Scott Stoner

Practice makes progress.

—Anonymous

You will notice that the title of this Lenten devotional is, “Practicing Courage with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind.” It is worth noting that the focus is on “practicing courage.” We did not title the devotional, “Learning About Courage” or, “Readings About Courage,” although we certainly will be engaging in learning and reading together.

We focus on *practicing* because our desire is for each of us to strengthen our ability to act with courage, especially when we find ourselves in the midst of challenging circumstances. For example, in yesterday’s reflection, Jan Kwiatkowski wrote about her work as a hospice chaplain. In that work, she encountered patients and their loved ones who were facing enormous spiritual, emotional, and physical challenges. What moved her was not how often the people she met talked about courage, but how often they actually practiced it.

We grow in our ability to do something when we practice it. The truth is not that “practice makes perfect,” but rather that “practice makes progress.” Life is always presenting us with more than enough challenges. Our hope for the journey through this season of Lent is that we may see these challenges as opportunities to practice courage and, in the process, to grow stronger, both emotionally and spiritually.

Making It Personal: Have you ever had the experience of growing in your ability to do something through practice? Can you think of a time when, as you were facing some hardship, you discovered a level of courage that you had not previously known? Is there a particular challenge you are facing now that is presenting you with a chance to practice additional courage?

Friday, February 28, 2020

Living an Examined Life

by Scott Stoner

The unexamined life is not worth living.

—Socrates

During my freshman year of college, I took an introductory class in philosophy as an elective. While I don't remember anything else about that course, there is one quote of Socrates I learned that I have always treasured: "The unexamined life is not worth living."

To positively restate the Greek philosopher's words, taking the time to examine our lives makes our lives fulfilling and worth living. I whole-heartedly agree with this sentiment and believe this wisdom applies not only to individuals, but to couples, families, and organizations, as well. A commitment to regular self-examination is a cornerstone of health and wellness in all aspects of life.

The benefit of taking time for self-examination is also acknowledged by all of the world religions. Every faith tradition has days and seasons that invite followers to focus on self-examination and their commitment to living a renewed life. The season of Lent, for those of us who are Christians, is just such a season. Just as an annual check-up with the doctor is good for one's physical health, Lent provides a yearly check-up for one's emotional and spiritual well-being.

The season of Lent also offers us the time, and thus the opportunity, to strengthen our spiritual well-being through the practice of giving something up, or by taking on a new practice or discipline that will help us to grow. The latter, taking something on, is precisely what we are offering in this devotion as we invite each of us to create a more intentional life when it comes to practicing courage.

Making It Personal: What is your response to Socrates' words, "The unexamined life is not worth living"? As you examine your current level of showing courage in the world, would you describe yourself as a courageous person? Why or why not, and are you satisfied with your answer?



Saturday, February 29, 2020

The Courage to Embrace the Ordinary

by Scott Stoner

I don't have to chase extraordinary moments to find happiness—it's right in front of me if I'm paying attention and practicing gratitude.

—Brené Brown

Each Saturday during Lent we will pause and reflect on the past week to consolidate what we have learned, and then to review what we have become aware of in our thoughts and responses during the week.

One thing we have learned this week from Jan Kwiatkowski's Ash Wednesday reflection is that courage is not necessarily about big and extraordinary choices, but is almost always found in the ordinary, small decisions we make every day. Courage can be expressed in the ordinary by getting up and going to work every morning, taking care of a sick loved one, cooking dinner every night, speaking up about an important cause, or being there for a friend in need.

Today is February 29, an extraordinary day, indeed. And so while we can, and do, enjoy things that are a little out of the ordinary, most of our days are actually quite ordinary. Knowing this makes the quote from Brené Brown all the more significant: "I don't have to chase extraordinary moments to find happiness—it's right in front of me if I'm paying attention and practicing gratitude."

Brené also writes about the importance of showing up for life as your real self. Doing so on a regular basis is something that indeed takes courage—not the big newsworthy kind of courage, but the type needed to show up as our authentic selves in all the ordinary moments of our lives.

Making It Personal: Reread Brené Brown's quote at the top of the page and note your response to it. What does the idea of "the courage to embrace the ordinary" mean to you? Can you think of a time when you have shown this kind of courage?

The First Sunday in Lent

March 1, 2020

Wilderness

by The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde

[After he was baptized] Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

—Matthew 4:1

The wilderness is a place of trial and vulnerability. It wasn't an easy place for Jesus, and it isn't an easy place for us whenever we find ourselves in a wilderness of our own.

Sometimes we go to the wilderness of our own accord because we know that it's time to make a change. So, we muster our courage and call the doctor to schedule a physical, reach out to a relative we haven't spoken to in years, or pray for the grace to forgive ourselves for something we've done.

Other times the wilderness comes to us, without warning. The telephone rings and suddenly life as we've known it is over. I don't believe that God causes those unwelcome wildernesses to appear, but I know that God is there to see us through, and that he provides us with the courage it will take to navigate the unfamiliar and sometimes frightening terrain.

Through is an important concept when it comes to the wilderness, for it is not our final destination. We travel through the wilderness on our way to somewhere else. But before we leave, the wilderness has a pearl of great price to impart.

The first wilderness temptation is to try and get out as quickly as we can. It's an understandable response, given our discomfort, but it guarantees that we will learn nothing from our experience. We leave the wilderness unscathed and revert to our old patterns in life.

The second wilderness temptation, however, is to stay too long. In particular, after an experience of grief or trauma, the wilderness can become a familiar place where little is required of us. Yet invariably, there comes



Monday, March 2, 2020

The Courage to Be Vulnerable

by Scott Stoner

The wilderness is a place of trial and vulnerability. It wasn't an easy place for Jesus, and it isn't an easy place for us.

— Mariann Edgar Budde

Jesus, led by the Spirit, entered a literal wilderness where he faced trial and vulnerability. Whether or not you and I ever enter such a wild, desolate place, we will all enter emotional, physical, spiritual, and relational wildernesses at some point in our lives.

Mariann Budde reminded us yesterday that there are two ways in which we can enter the wilderness. We can enter by our own choice, or life can throw us into the wilderness in ways that are totally unplanned and unexpected. And, as with Jesus, at other times we are called into the wilderness by the Spirit as an opportunity to grow and deepen our identity as people of faith.

However, it is when we find ourselves entering the wilderness that our courage to be vulnerable is tested. The wilderness is always outside our comfort zone and so vulnerability is a given. What is not a given, but is a choice, is whether we will have the courage, as Mariann wrote yesterday, to stay in the wilderness long enough to learn what it has to teach us.

In our daily reflections for this week, we will reflect on what it means to have the courage to be vulnerable in all aspects of our lives. We will structure our reflections around the eight areas of wellness of the Living Compass model for well-being and discover that planned, or unplanned, times of wilderness and vulnerability can be, as was with Jesus, times of deep growth and transformation.

Making It Personal: How would you describe the transformation that took place for Jesus during his forty days in the wilderness? Looking back on your own life, can you identify a wilderness time, planned or unplanned, when you experienced a significant transformation?

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Practicing Courage with All Your Heart

by Scott Stoner

You don't develop courage by being happy in your relationships everyday. You develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity.

—Epicurus

The *Heart* quadrant of the Living Compass model for well-being focuses on *Healthy Relationships* and *Handling Emotions*. Many of the important relationships in our lives, including relationships with friends, family members, colleagues, and neighbors, will likely experience challenging moments over a lifetime. This is because every relationship we are a part of is made up of two imperfect individuals. And because each of us is imperfect, our relationships are also imperfect. We hurt and disappoint one another, we become irritable and short with each other, and thus we experience wilderness periods that test our relationships.

As Mariann Budde wrote in her Sunday reflection, the operative word when it comes to time in the wilderness is *through*. It is important that when we find ourselves in a hard place in a relationship, we don't get stuck there, but that we grow in and through the challenging time. In fact, most of us can look at our strongest relationships and realize that there have been hard times in the relationship that have ultimately made our connection deeper and more meaningful.

It takes courage to be able to acknowledge when we have been wrong and have hurt someone we care about. It takes courage to ask for forgiveness. Only when we are comfortable with our own vulnerability will we be able to see and acknowledge the “log in our own eye,” rather than focusing solely on the “speck in the eye of our sister or brother.”

Authentic, lasting relationships involve two imperfect and vulnerable people who have the courage not to give up on each other.

Making It Personal: Can you think of a time when a relationship failed because you and/or the other person did not have the courage to be vulnerable? Can you think of a relationship you have today that is strong because you and the other person did have the courage to be vulnerable?



Wednesday, March 4, 2020

Practicing Courage with All Your Soul

by Scott Stoner

We may not ever understand why we suffer or be able to control the forces that cause our suffering, but we can have a lot to say about what the suffering does to us, and what sort of people we become because of it.

—Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

The *Soul* quadrant of the Living Compass model for well-being includes *Spirituality* and *Rest & Play*. In this reflection I will focus on what it means to have the courage to be vulnerable as it relates to our spiritual lives.

Few things feel more like being lost in the wildness than the grief that we experience after the death of a loved one. As a priest and a pastoral counselor, I know that grief is not just an emotional wilderness, but that often it is also a time of disruption to a person's spiritual well-being. In the initial experience of grief it is not uncommon for people to feel angry at God, and to feel that their faith is being tested.

As we read in Sunday's reflection, it is important to not get stuck in the wilderness. Perhaps this is why Psalm 23 is so comforting to those who are grieving. It says, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil." Note the emphasis on movement. It acknowledges that the valley of grief is real and it is deep, but it describes it as something that is walked *through*, not a place to stay.

The profound spiritual questions that get raised in the early experiences of grief can feel like we are experiencing a breakdown in our faith. With time, spiritual guidance, and the support of a spiritual community, many who are grieving actually end experiencing a breakthrough in their faith life. A new place opens up to them in which they develop a deeper, more intimate faith in God, one that embraces and sustains them in their time of vulnerability.

Making It Personal: Have you ever had your faith tested in the midst of grief and loss? Are you experiencing this right now? Looking back, can you remember a time when your faith grew as a result of spending time in the wilderness of grief?

Thursday, March 5, 2020

Practicing Courage with All Your Strength

by Scott Stoner

Resilience is the capacity of a system, enterprise, or a person to maintain its core purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changed circumstances.

—Andrew Zolli

The *Strength* quadrant of the Living Compass model for well-being focuses on *Care for the Body* and *Stress Resilience*.

One of the core concepts to emerge out of the field of positive psychology is the importance of resilience, a quality that helps people to thrive and to be well. Positive psychologists are studying the question of why some people are able to bounce back and overcome adversity, while others are not.

Their research has revealed two factors that are foundational to our ability to be resilient: spirituality and community. Spirituality provides us with meaning, hope, and a larger perspective in the midst of challenging times. It focuses as a “true north” in life when tough times are threatening to knock us off course.

Having a supportive community to turn to when times are tough is also a foundational factor in resilience. A recent study found that isolation for older people is as great a health risk as smoking. We need the love and support of others always, but most especially when we are in the midst of a stressful time.

Having the courage to nurture our spirituality and to strengthen our connections with others will not prevent us from experiencing vulnerability and adversity at times. We will find, though, that our spirituality and the support of others are key factors in helping us to bounce back and move forward whenever we face unexpected challenges in our lives.

Making It Personal: What are your thoughts about the quote above by Andrew Zolli about resilience? Do you agree that spirituality and community are key factors in resilience? Can you think of an area in your life where you might need to summon up some courage to be more resilient?



Friday, March 6, 2020

Practicing Courage with All Your Mind

by Scott Stoner

Speak the truth even if your voice is shaking.

—Unknown

The *Mind* quadrant of the Living Compass model for well-being addresses *Vocation* and *Organization*.

The word *vocation* comes from the same root as the words for *voice* and *vocal*, and so we can think of our vocation as how and when we express our unique voice in the world. Scripture tells us that, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Each of us possesses unique gifts and a unique voice. We can express our gifts and our voice in all aspects of our lives: work, family, friends, community, and social-political actions. To express our voice fully, though, can make us feel vulnerable. The quote above acknowledges this vulnerability when it calls us to “speak the truth even if your voice is shaking.”

Speaking truth to a family member, friend, or colleague who has hurt or mistreated us can make us feel quite vulnerable. Speaking truth in the face of racism, injustice, and violence can cause our voices to shake. Courage is needed so that we can speak up.

Hearing the voice of the one who calls us to follow him can give us the courage we need to grow in our Christian walk. “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

Making It Personal: Is there a time in your life when your voice shook when you spoke the truth? Have you ever been hesitant, or are you hesitant now, to speak the truth because doing so would make you vulnerable? What do you think it means to speak the truth “in love” as described in Ephesians 4:15?

Saturday, March 7, 2020

Letting Ourselves Be Seen

by Scott Stoner

Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.

—Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*

Our theme for this week has been the courage to be vulnerable. The reality is that we all are vulnerable, pretty much all of the time. So to be more precise, when we talk about the courage to be vulnerable we are really talking about the courage to allow our vulnerability to be seen and to be known by others. Brené Brown captures this perfectly in the quote above: “Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.”

As we walk this Lenten journey together, I encourage you to take Saturdays as a time to reflect on and digest what you have experienced and learned the previous week. Each reflection contains a “Making It Personal” section with prompts to help you apply that day’s reflection to your own life. What you learn by engaging these prompts may well be the most significant part of your Lenten journey.

You might want to take a few minutes to look back over this week’s reflections. If there was one you didn’t pay close attention to, perhaps you can read it again and give it some thought. Or maybe there was a particular reflection that really spoke to you and you might want to spend more time with that one.

If you are reading this devotional on your own, might there be someone with whom you would like to share your experience? Remember, too, that you can join hundreds of others who are discussing the daily readings in our private Facebook group. See the inside front cover for more information.

Making It Personal: What is your response to the Brené Brown quote, “Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen”? As you look back over this week and reflect on its theme of the courage to be vulnerable, what stands out most for you? Is there anything you want to do differently going forward based on what you have learned this week?

The Second Sunday in Lent

March 8, 2020

Courageous in God's Eyes

by The Rev. Theodora Nmade Brooks

Whenever we witness or are told about an incredible act of courage, we celebrate and cheer the individual(s). But often as we do so, deep within us is a silent insistent voice telling us that we are NOT as strong or courageous! It is easy to assume that, unlike us, these heroes are gifted. Holy Scripture is full of heroes, people whom we think had incredible spiritual gifts that we mere mortals do not have. Or so we think.

The definition of courage is, “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.” If this is the case then we can breathe a sigh of relief because this definition expands our narrow understanding of who can be a hero and who is courageous. What we do not see in the media, nor does our inner critic consider, are those agonizing moments when you and I toss and turn questioning God, questioning our next steps, trying to rationalize and agonizing over whatever situation in which we find ourselves. Do we really think Abraham immediately started packing when God told him to leave his community? Did Nicodemus go to see Jesus that night because it was his only free evening? “No” to both questions. They had to face their doubts and fears and that took courage! The assurance from God we find in Psalm 121 reads like a mantra someone in ancient times repeated over and over in order to face their own fears, and to this day we continue to recite it in times of fear and doubt.

Friends you may not make the news but you ARE courageous! Do you remember times when you felt so alone, agonizing nights when the walls were the silent witnesses to your prayers, confusion, sense of hopelessness, and tears? What about those times when you dreaded making a certain call or having THAT conversation? It takes a whole lot of courage to be in a tough place and deal with hard decisions and circumstances. Abraham did not immediately call the moving company,



Monday, March 9, 2020

The Courage to Grow

by Scott Stoner

Courage: mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.

—Merriam-Webster Dictionary

The story of Nicodemus coming to talk to Jesus at night (John 3:1-17) was read and reflected upon in many churches yesterday for the Second Sunday in Lent. We are told that Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews. He had no doubt heard of Jesus and his teachings, and for some reason, on this particular night, he decides to seek Jesus out to speak with him face to face.

We know that Nicodemus comes under cover of darkness, most likely because he is clearly moving out of his comfort zone in coming to talk with Jesus. After all, he is known as a leader of the Jews and so what could he possibly have to learn from someone like Jesus? As it turns out, a great deal. Jesus tells him that anyone who wants to experience the kingdom of God must be born again. This leads to a back-and-forth conversation in which Nicodemus learns that Jesus is speaking of a spiritual rebirth, a birth that is “of water and Spirit.”

In yesterday’s reflection, Teddy Brooks quoted the definition of courage found in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (see above). Clearly Nicodemus demonstrated courage in coming to Jesus because he had “the mental and moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.”

Our theme for this second week in Lent will be the courage to grow, especially by moving out of our comfort zones. We will reflect on the various ways in which God might be calling us, like Nicodemus, to move out of our comfort zones in order to be born anew.

Making It Personal: Read the story of Nicodemus coming to talk with Jesus, found in John 3:1-17. What speaks to you in this story about courage? What do you think of the dictionary definition of courage? Is there anything from your life experience that you would add to that definition?

Tuesday, March 10, 2020

The Growth Zone

by Scott Stoner

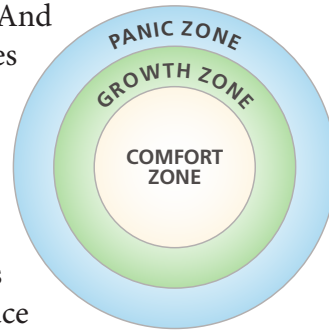
Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.

—Neale Donald Walsch

Take a moment and look at the graphic on this page that illustrates the Comfort Zone, Growth Zone, and the Panic Zone. As we reflect this week on the courage to grow by moving out of our comfort zones, this graphic can serve as a helpful guide.

We learn from this graphic that all growth is initially uncomfortable, and that moving into the Growth Zone requires us to step outside our Comfort Zone. This is the courageous step that Nicodemus took when he came and talked with Jesus. And this is the step we take when we open ourselves to learn or to experience something new.

However, if we have set a goal for growth or change that is too big or we are making that change too quickly, we may find ourselves in the Panic Zone. Life, too, can throw us into the Panic Zone when we are forced to face unplanned and unexpected challenges. Because we rarely grow in the Panic Zone, when we find ourselves there, we will want to seek support in order to move into the Growth Zone.



Have you noticed how God has a regular habit of calling us into the Growth Zone? This is true for individuals, as well as groups, communities, and congregations. Spiritual growth is an ongoing life-long process. It takes courage and the support of a loving community to continuously say “yes” to God’s call to be born again, and again, and again.

Making It Personal: What insight do you have when you look at the graphic of the three zones? Is there a specific way in which God is calling you right now to move out of your Comfort Zone? Are you experiencing any part of the Panic Zone right now, and if so, how might you seek support to move into the Growth Zone?



Wednesday, March 11, 2020

The Courage to Face Our Doubts and Fears

by Scott Stoner

Feel the Fear ... and Do It Anyway.

—Susan Jeffers

As you go through your day, note how often you or someone else starts a sentence with the words, “I’m afraid ...” It may be more often than you think. Common examples include, “I’m afraid ... to ask for ..., to talk to them about..., to apply for ..., to start over ..., to admit I was wrong ..., to sign up for ..., to reach for ..., to commit to ..., to try ..., to express how I really feel ..., to ask for help ..., to say no.”

Psychologist Susan Jeffers wrote a best-selling book that addresses our feelings of fear, and its title summarizes her advice to her readers: *Feel the Fear ... and Do It Anyway*. Fear is often what keeps us from moving out of our Comfort Zones and yet, as Jeffers notes, fear can actually make us more comfortable to go ahead and act in the face of our fears.

In her book she identifies five truths about facing fear.

1. The fear will never go away as long as you continue to grow.
2. The only way to get rid of the fear of doing something is to go out and do it.
3. The only way to feel better about yourself is to go out and do it.
4. Not only are you afraid when facing the unknown, so is everyone else.
5. Pushing through fear is less frightening than living with the bigger underlying fear that comes from a feeling of helplessness!

Making It Personal: As you read the five truths about facing fear from Susan Jeffers, is there one that you know to be true from personal experience? Is there one truth that has your name on it right now? If so, how might you live into this truth?

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Expanding Our Understanding of Courage

by Scott Stoner

Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying (whispering), "I will try again tomorrow."

—Mary Anne Radmacher

I am blessed to have known and been inspired by countless courageous people throughout my life, people who have expanded my definition of courageous. I am guessing the same is true for you, too.

Teddy Brooks expanded our understanding of courage in Sunday's reflection when she wrote that acts of courage are not limited to large noteworthy public displays of courage, but are more often simple, quiet actions that oftentimes no one else even knows about. It is this broader understanding of courage that I have in mind when I say I have been blessed to know so many people of courage.

I think of all the people I've known who have been faithful caretakers to loved ones, sometimes for years, even decades. I think of people who courageously live every day with a serious physical or mental health issue. I think of people who have overcome addiction, living their life one day at a time. I think of people who have been victims of racism, and other forms of injustice, and have found the way and the will to persevere and to stand up and fight against those injustices. Just like the people you know who live courageous lives, these people most likely will not make the headlines, or receive any kind of public recognition.

I pray a prayer of thanksgiving for having known so many courageous people who have demonstrated the ability to say, day after day, "I will try again tomorrow." I pray that I, too, may exhibit a fraction of the courage these people have modeled for me when I face adversity in my life.

Making It Personal: Read the quote from Mary Anne Radmacher above and note your response to it. Who do you know that models the kind of quiet, day-to-day courage described in this reflection? Can you think of times when you practiced courage in a way that didn't necessarily "roar," but showed itself in a more private and quiet manner?



Friday, March 13, 2020

When God Calls Us to Move out of Our Comfort Zones

by Scott Stoner

*For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather
a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.*

—2 Timothy 1:7

The Bible is full of stories of God calling people to do things they could not have imagined ever doing. Mary and Joseph are obvious examples. So, too, are Moses, Ruth, David, Samuel, Peter, Rebekah, and Paul.

Last Sunday we read about God calling Abraham to leave his home country and to trust God's call to him. "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you" (Genesis 12:1-2). As we noted earlier, the Gospel reading for last Sunday contains the story of God calling Nicodemus to risk moving out of his comfort zone. There seems to be a theme here.

The decision to risk leaving one's status quo to follow God was most likely as much of a gut-wrenching decision for those in biblical times as it is for us today. Teddy Brooks wrote of this when she talked about "those agonizing moments when you and I toss and turn questioning God, questioning our next steps, trying to rationalize and agonizing over whatever situation in which we find ourselves."

All change is hard, even change to which God is calling us. Sometimes it's hard to discern what is God's call to change, and what is simply our own ego. During times of change, it is invaluable to discern God's call to us in the context of community, seeking the spiritual guidance of others whom we trust and who can help us be true to God's call to grow and change.

Making It Personal: Can you think of time when God was calling you to have courage and make a change that you were not quite sure you wanted to make? Is there a change that God is calling you to make right now? To whom do you turn for spiritual counsel when you need help discerning God's call and direction for your life?

Saturday, March 14, 2020

Moving out of Our Comfort Zones to Help Others

by Scott Stoner

I imagine that the first question the priest and the Levite asked was: "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But ... the good Samaritan reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

—Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love*

As we learned yesterday, choosing to grow and change—even when it makes us uncomfortable—is key to our spiritual growth. One specific way that our Christian faith calls us to grow is to risk getting involved in helping others, even when it makes us uncomfortable.

In the well-known story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the priest and Levite chose safety when they chose to not help a man who had been beaten and robbed. Only the outcast Samaritan man stopped, not only to help his neighbor where he lay, but also to take him to an inn and pay for his stay while recovering.

As individuals, and as Christian communities, God calls us to risk leaving our Comfort Zones to help those whom life has thrown in a Panic Zone. Jesus was always risking getting involved with those whom the society at his time judged unclean, often enduring the harsh criticism of the religious leaders of his day.

Loving our neighbor, especially when it makes us uncomfortable, is not easy. When it comes to living out this central commandment of our faith to love our neighbor who is alone, marginalized, discriminated against, and hurting, may we pray for the courage to be like the Samaritan and not the priest and Levite, both in our individual lives and in our faith communities.

Making It Personal: Have you ever found yourself in a Panic Zone and blessed by a Good Samaritan who reached out to help? Where is God calling you or your faith community right now to move out of your Comfort Zone in order to help others?

The Third Sunday in Lent

March 15, 2020

Courage Found at the Well

by The Very Rev. Dominic Barrington

*O life is a toil, and love is a trouble, beauty will fade
and riches will flee, / Wages will dwindle and prices will
double, / And nothing is as I would wish it to be.*

—Housewife’s Lament*

Thus laments the “housewife” in the melancholy folksong of the same name—a song of ennui and despair, set on the lips of “a poor woman the picture of gloom,” who is full of complaining. But the ground-down pessimism of the woman in the folksong could just as well be the world-weariness of the Samaritan woman Jesus encounters at Jacob’s well—a woman for whom life has truly become a toil.

The repeated journey to the well is a real toil, which is why she wants to stop coming to draw her water. But it is not hard to deduce that she is weary about plenty of other things, as well. Weary of men (*you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband*). In other words, “I’ve made a mess of love, and partnerships, and sex and I can no longer be bothered taking my fellow human being seriously.” Weary of religion (*our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem*). In other words, “Who can be bothered taking religion seriously, with all these stupid disagreements?”

And while some of the Samaritan woman’s problems may relate to the nature of the society in which she lived, some of them surely stem from her inability to practice courage. Her choices have led her to a life of being used and abused, cynical and world-weary. Choices that lacked discernment, and made without the courage that is rooted in heart, soul, strength, and mind.

But then something changes for this broken woman, for whom “nothing is as I would wish it to be.” Something changes at the well, when it is “about Noon.” For at the well is someone else, weary and in need, but



Monday, March 16, 2020

The Courage to Change Direction

by Scott Stoner

*Although no one can go back and make a brand new start,
anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.*

—Carl Bard

“**A**nd having practiced courage, this woman’s life would never again be the same.” This line from Dominic Barrington’s reflection yesterday describes just what can be at stake when a person chooses to practice courage. Courage can change the whole trajectory of our lives, as it clearly did for the Samaritan woman at the well.

This week’s theme will focus on the courage it takes to change direction. When we choose to keep on doing what we’ve always done because it is the “path of least resistance,” we rarely consider that a courageous choice. The truth is that change is hard; we all love patterns and routines. In fact we need patterns and routines to order our lives. But when those patterns and routines no longer serve us, or when they themselves are unhealthy, it takes courage to change.

The Samaritan woman had a daily routine of going to the well alone. We have no idea how long she had been doing so, but we can imagine that she had been doing the same thing day in and day out, month after month, year after year. And then one day her life is changed by the courageous choices she makes, both in her willingness to be open to a chance encounter with an unexpected visitor, and afterwards when she dares to go back into the city to proclaim the miracle and bounty of her encounter with Jesus. She could have chosen to ignore him, but she found the courage to honestly engage him and her life was never the same.

God gives us free will and therefore we are always free to change, or not. The choice is ours. May we all be inspired by the courage of the woman at the well.

Making It Personal: Have you ever made a choice to change directions that was as dramatic as the Samaritan woman at the well? Are you considering such a change now? Can you think of a time when you practiced courage in even a small way, and your life was never the same again?

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

The Courage to Practice Honest Self-Reflection

by Scott Stoner

*If you do not change direction, you may
end up where you are heading.*

—Lao Tzu

When we think of someone who has made a positive change, we typically recall the actions they took. The process of change, though, usually starts well before an outward sign is observable. It's a process that almost always begins with honest self-reflection.

Honest self-reflection is challenging, especially when it involves acknowledging that something is not quite right. The first inkling we get that a change may be needed often comes to us as a “whisper.” It might be a whisper of a health issue, tension in a relationship, a feeling of emptiness, anxiety, or exhaustion.

Perhaps long before she encountered Jesus, the woman at the well had heard a whisper, but rather than honestly facing what it was trying to tell her, found it was easier to ignore or rationalize away. “I don't really thirst for something different. Everything is just fine.”

There are so many ways we can rationalize away the whispers that tell us things are out of balance in our lives. Believing the rationalizations over the whispers relieves us, at least temporarily, of the anxiety of having to practice the courage it takes to make a change. But if the whispers are ignored long enough, they often turn to shouts and then it may be harder for us to make a needed change.

It takes courage to listen to the “whispers” through honest self-reflection, but with practice, we can trust that we are taking the first step in the journey toward life-giving change.

Making It Personal: What is your response to the idea that the process of change starts with honest self-reflection? Can you think of a time when you ignored a whisper in your life? Can you think of a time when you listened to a whisper regarding a change, and then had the courage to make that change? Are you hearing any such whispers in your life right now?



Wednesday, March 18, 2020

The Courage to Stop Digging

by Scott Stoner

If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.

—Will Rogers

Isometimes have a hard time admitting that I am wrong. For example, there have been a number of new initiatives that I have tried over the years with our Living Compass ministry that were complete flops. That would be fine in and of itself, even expected for a growing and developing ministry.

The problem, though, was that I had a hard time admitting these initiatives were not working, despite all the signs pointing toward the obvious. Instead of acknowledging the signs, I often would invest even more time, energy, and money in them in order to prove that they were, in fact, good ideas. With time and hard-won experience, I am happy to say that I am, more often than not, better able to heed the advice from Will Rogers: “If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.”

I don't think I'm the only one who struggles to admit when I am wrong, or to admit that something I am doing is clearly not working. I see this same tendency in a lot of the couples I work with as a marriage therapist. Often more hurt is caused by denying and defending a wrongdoing than by the actual wrongdoing itself. An apology finally offered after an hour of denying or minimizing is much less meaningful than an apology that is offered immediately without hesitation. But apologies take courage, and can be hard.

Sometimes the courage to change directions simply means first acknowledging that we were wrong. And when we can do that, it releases the energy it takes to defend or minimize our mistake or misjudgment, and frees us up to move in a new direction.

Making It Personal: To paraphrase Will Roger's quote as a question, “Do you ever find yourself continuing to dig, even when you find yourself in a hole”? If so, why do you think that is? What helps you to more easily acknowledge a mistake or misjudgment, and then begin to move in a new direction?

Thursday, March 19, 2020

Overcoming the Tendency to Backtrack

by Scott Stoner

Don't look back, you're not going that way.

—Anonymous

Once we muster the courage to decide to change directions, however small that change in direction may be, we soon discover that this decision is actually a series of ongoing decisions. Once we are on our new course, we soon find that we have to continue to make the decision to stay on course, even when we are tempted to turn around.

I can easily imagine that the Samaritan woman at the well experienced some degree of second-guessing her experience with Jesus. As she walked back to town, she could have made the safe decision to not let her encounter with Jesus change anything in her life. She must have wondered if people would believe her when she shared her experience. Would they be willing to see her differently? She must have been tempted to go back and act as if nothing had happened.

We know from the story of the Exodus journey that the people who were journeying with Moses in the wilderness had their moments of wanting to turn around and go back to the familiarity of what they had known in Egypt. This is as true for organizations as it is for individuals. Who among us doesn't know of a business, church, or other organization that would rather choose to continue to decline than change direction? Changing direction is hard work—even when we know that what we are leaving behind is not working for us—because it requires us to look at ourselves honestly and make hard, often courageous, decisions.

Making It Personal: Can you think of a time when you struggled with the desire to “go back” after you made a decision to make a change in your life? Are you experiencing that struggle in your life right now? Have you ever been, or are you currently, part of an organization, church, or institution that gives up and wants to “go back” when the work of change gets hard and requires courage?



Friday, March 20, 2020

When Others Notice Change in Us

by Scott Stoner

You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

—Matthew 7:16-17

When we have made a significant change in our lives, it is not uncommon for others to notice. At first it might be a wondering, “There’s something different about you lately, but I can’t quite put my finger on it. . . . You seem happier, lighter, more energetic.”

In Sunday’s reflection, Dominic Barrington wrote about the courage to change as being wholistic because it affects every aspect of our lives—heart, soul, strength, and mind. Changing direction in one aspect of our life will radiate out and manifest itself in multiple ways.

The Scripture above talks about good fruit coming forth from good trees. In a similar manner, good decisions and good changes that we make in our lives usually bear good fruit, and bad decisions usually bear bad fruit. Scripture reminds us that we will be known by the fruits that we bear.

We are expressing something similar to “good fruit” when we say to someone we know who has made a positive change, “I could sense there was something different about you, and now I know what it is.” Who among us has not been inspired to make a change in our lives because of the positive, contagious energy we have experienced from someone else making a similar change?

As we have been talking about all week, change is hard work. How wonderful and rewarding it can be, then, when the hard work of change radiates from us in a way that others notice our more positive way of being in the world.

Making It Personal: Have you had the experience of others noticing that there is something different about you when you have made a change in your life? Have you ever noticed that in others? Have you had the experience of making a change in your life because you were inspired by someone else making a similar change?

Saturday, March 21, 2020

Now I See

by Scott Stoner

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.

—John Newton

When John Newton, author of the beloved hymn, *Amazing Grace*, wrote the words, “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see,” he was writing about his own powerful change of direction. Like the Samaritan woman at the well, Newton’s change of direction, from being the captain of a slave ship to becoming an Anglican clergy person, was in response to a direct encounter with God.

The Bible is full of stories of people who have been changed in and through their encounters with God, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit. As people of faith, we need not ever be afraid of change. In fact, as people of faith we expect that our ongoing walk with God will undoubtedly lead to ongoing change and growth in our lives. And, as people of faith, we believe that God—named or not named—is the author of all change and growth.

“I once was lost, but now am found” reminds us that change in our lives often comes, not as the result of our own initiative, but as the result of God’s initiative. As we have already considered, we still have the free will to respond to God’s invitation to change, and therefore have an essential role in the change process. As we conclude our week of reflecting on having the courage to change direction, it is good to remember that the initial invitation to change is often an invitation from God.

As you reflect back on what you have experienced this week, and as you think about significant changes you have made, or are making, be sure to take time to reflect on where you find God in the midst of these changes.

Making It Personal: Have you ever changed direction in your life in response to a clear sign or calling from God? Was that call clear at the time or did it become clear later, after you were making the change? Are you aware of a change right now that God is inviting you to make?

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 22, 2020

God's Works Revealed in You

by Anna Fitch Courie

Over the course of history, it has been the nature of human beings to treat those with disease, disability, or infirmity as “unclean” or “less-than” in the sight of society. Our society has also judged others by their afflictions, believing, as the disciples did in John, that these people must have done something bad to deserve the hardships they have to endure.

Even today, we have a tendency to collectively think that something is “less-than” about a person with disease or disability, that they, or their family, did something wrong and they somehow deserve their “punishment.” But John comes in with blazing testimony that these judgements could not be further from the truth.

The disciples asked Jesus who sinned, the blind man or his parents, so that he deserved to be blind. And Jesus responds, “[Neither!] ... he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him (John 9:1-24).” This means that each and every one of us can be a vessel through which God works, *despite* or *because* of the ways in which we are broken.

It is not a coincidence that the Bible describes people's encounters with God as causing them to shine. When God touches us, like the blind man, we are transformed into shining beacons of God's grace, mercy, and love. No matter what illness, disease, disability, injury we suffer, or sin we have committed, God's works can be revealed through each one of us.

All of us play an important part in God's amazing plan, but it takes courage to say “yes” to God's invitation. It takes courage to allow God to work through us and not be worried about what the world thinks. It takes being willing to be driven away, just as the blind man, and continuing to preach the good works of God. It takes discipline, dedication, and a commitment that, no matter how many times we get beaten down, we will get back up to allow God's work to be revealed in us.



Monday, March 23, 2020

The Courage to Let Go

by Scott Stoner

Courage is the power to let go of the familiar.

—Raymond Lindquist

We are now more than halfway through our Lenten journey. Our weekly themes so far have focused on the courage to be vulnerable, the courage to grow, and the courage to change direction.

This week we will offer a series of reflections on a theme that has been implicit in each of the previous themes: “The Courage to Let Go.” It takes courage to let go of what is familiar, familiar ways of doing things, as well as letting go of familiar lenses through which we view the world, ones that may not fully reflect the lens through which God views the world.

In the Gospel reading for yesterday, the Fourth Sunday in Lent, we hear the story of Jesus healing a man who has been blind since birth. The story opens with the disciples asking Jesus, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The disciples are simply viewing sin through the familiar lens at that time, that illness was always the direct result of sin.

Anna Courie wrote in yesterday’s reflection, “Over the course of history, it has been the nature of humans to treat those with disease, disability, or infirmity as “unclean” or “less-than” in the sight of society.” Unless we are aware of this lens through which we view others or even ourselves, and more importantly, unless we are willing to let go of it, we risk not being able to fully embrace the dignity of each and every person as a child of God, regardless of their current state of health or ability.

Making It Personal: What is your reaction to the quote from Raymond Lindquist, “Courage is the power to let go of the familiar”? What is your response to Anna Courie’s thought about how the lens through which people have typically viewed people with illness or disabilities? Can you think of a time when you had the courage to let go of something you were doing, or a particular way of thinking that you came to believe was hurting yourself or others?

Tuesday, March 24, 2020

The Courage to Let Go of Perfectionism

by Scott Stoner

*The only true perfection available to us is the
honest acceptance of our imperfection.*

—Richard Rohr

It is hard to underestimate the damage that the “disease of perfectionism” does to the well-being of ourselves and to others. Perfectionism creates deep feelings of lack and inadequacy in ourselves, sending us on an endless and impossible search to correct every perceived flaw. It can also create harsh criticisms, which can then become the justification for the mistreatment of others who are judged to be “less than perfect” in some way.

Perfectionism is not in any way the same thing as striving to be our best selves and striving to do the right thing. Perfectionism can actually cripple us and prevent us from striving to be our best, like when a child who is constantly criticized for not living up to some perfectionistic standards may eventually give up and stop trying.

The Bible is full of stories of people who, when first called by God to do something, respond by stating their inadequacies. Each of them knows their imperfections all too well, and thus believe God would be better off calling someone else. In this past Sunday’s reflection, Anna Courie makes the point that God does not merely accept our imperfections, but actually works through them. Referencing the story of Jesus healing the man who was born blind since birth, she writes, “Each and every one of us is a vessel through which God works, despite our brokenness.”

As people of faith, our belovedness is not something we earn or achieve. We are beloved by God because we are God’s children. Knowing and truly internalizing this is key to letting go of perfectionism.

Making It Personal: Do you or have you ever struggled with perfectionism? Are you aware of the harmful effects of perfectionism, either in how you treat yourself or in how you view and treat others? What might help you to let go of perfectionism?



Wednesday, March 25, 2020

The Courage to Let Go of Feelings of Inadequacy

by Scott Stoner

*A flower does not think of competing with
the flower next to it. It just blooms.*

—Zin Shin

Perfectionism and feelings of inadequacy often go hand in hand. It is the feeling of being inadequate that can drive someone toward perfectionism.

It is also possible that feelings of inadequacy hinder a person from believing they can do or achieve things that are worthwhile. In this case, rather than motivating a person to try to be perfect, feelings of inadequacy may cause the person to give up trying at all.

In the story we looked at last week of the Samaritan woman who meets Jesus at the well, we see a woman who is hindered by deep feelings of inadequacy. It is only through her confession and encounter with Jesus that she overcomes her feelings of not being good enough, and is then able to go forth so deeply transformed that her testimony begins to transform others. We see a similar transformation in the story of the man blind since birth. Once Jesus heals and changes him, he goes on to change others with his testimony.

Feelings of inadequacy should not be confused with humility. Humility is a spiritual virtue that has been described as not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less often, and being modest about your own place in the world. Love is grounded in humility. It is difficult to love—ourselves and others—if we are overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy. To paraphrase the quote above about the flower, a flower doesn't waste energy wondering if it is inadequate compared to other flowers, it simply uses its energy to bloom.

Making It Personal: Have you struggled, or do you currently struggle, with feelings of adequacy? If so, what gives you the courage let go of those feelings? Do you see how letting go of feelings of inadequacy could free up energy to help you bloom?

Thursday, March 26, 2020

The Courage to Let Go of Darkness

by Scott Stoner

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ...

Take no part in the unfruitful work of darkness.

—Ephesians 5:8-11

The passage from Ephesians calls us to live as children of the light. On the surface, this sounds not only desirable, but maybe even easy. After all, who would choose to live in darkness instead of light? Upon reflection, though, and deeper self-reflection, we recognize how it is all too easy to choose to live in the darkness of prejudice, pettiness, and self-righteousness.

The news is full of stories of bigotry, racism, and hatred. Behind each of these stories are people who are choosing to live in the dark rather than in the light. Living in the light of God's love is a continual call to change, grow, and to repent when we have chosen to live in darkness.

Most churches include a prayer of confession of sin in their Sunday services. Darkness is not just "out there" in other people. Each of us has the capacity to choose thoughts, words, and deeds that reflect sin and darkness, just as we can choose those which spread light and love.

In last Sunday's reflection Anna Courie described stories in the Bible of peoples' faces shining when they chose to live in the presence and power of God's light. It is a good reminder that we manifest and radiate out to others the energy in which we choose to live.

Making It Personal: What is your response to the Scripture quote from Ephesians? Why do you think someone might choose to remain in the darkness rather than living in the light? Have you struggled, or do you struggle, with that decision yourself?



Friday, March 27, 2020

The Courage to Let Go of Fear and Worry

by Scott Stoner

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

—Psalm 23:4

Every time I preach a sermon about worry, people come to me and say, “I struggle with worry so much—you wrote that sermon just for me, didn’t you?” My response is always something like, “Actually I wrote it for me out of my ongoing struggle with worry, but clearly I am not the only one for whom this is a daily issue.”

On a good day I can let go of worry, I can “let go and let God.” On other days I let it go and then take it right back. The author of Psalm 23 also knows about worry and fear. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” What is comforting to me is that the author is not consumed by fear and worry, but instead focuses on the comfort that God’s presence offers. The confidence in God’s comfort, so beautifully described in this psalm, is why it is so often read at funerals, and why so many of us seek solace in it when we are walking through a valley of loss and grief.

The root meaning of the word *worry* means *to strangle*. That seems appropriate given how worry can constrict our spiritual and emotional well-being. And while it is probably impossible to choose never to worry, we do have the choice to become aware when our worry is excessive, and to make choices that will help us to let go of perhaps not all of it, but most of it. For me, that choice is always a spiritual choice, some version of “letting go and letting God.”

Making It Personal: “Let go and let God,” may seem like an overused cliché, but do you find comfort or wisdom in these words? Does Psalm 23 provide comfort for you in times of worry? Is there a particular line from the psalm that gives you comfort? Have you ever felt that worry was constricting your emotional and/or spiritual well-being?

Saturday, March 28, 2020

The Courage to Let Go of Prejudice

by Scott Stoner

*Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,
and respect the dignity of every human being?*

—Baptismal Covenant, Book of Common Prayer, p. 305

I recently listened to an interview with a well-respected marketing expert, during which she said that buyers make their decisions about whether they prefer a particular brand or product in less than two seconds, and that their decision-making process is almost entirely unconscious. She went on to explain that they make their decision based primarily on appearance, including color, size, and shape.

Whether or not this is true about marketing, it is unfortunately all too true in our day-to-day interactions with one another. We unconsciously pre-judge others based on their appearance, often related to their color, size, and shape, among other factors. Anna Courie wrote about one form of bias and prejudice in her reflection last Sunday: “Even today, we have a tendency to collectively think that something is “less-than” about a person with disease or disability.” We often do the same regarding race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Tribal thinking, which almost always includes strong prejudices about the “others” who are not a part of one’s tribe, is strong in our culture. As people of faith, we are called to reject all forms of prejudice, and to “strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being” (Book of Common Prayer). It takes courage to let go of our prejudices and engage in this counter-cultural way of accepting and loving others.

Making It Personal: Sometimes it is easier to be aware of our prejudices by looking at our past. Are you aware of any prejudices that you used to have that you have been able to overcome? Looking at your life today, are there people you find particularly challenging to treat with dignity and to see as beloved children of God, just like you?

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 29, 2020

Courage Is Grace Under Pressure

by The Right Rev. Samuel Rodman

When I was in college I took a public speaking course. One day at the beginning of class, our professor announced that we would each be invited to pick a printed quotation out of a basket. We would then have 30 seconds to prepare before delivering a one-minute speech on the quotation.

When it was my turn, the slip of paper I picked was a quotation by Hemmingway: “Courage is grace under pressure.” I don’t remember all that I said that day. I do remember that the grade wasn’t very good. And I chased down the professor after class to ask him about it.

He said the assignment was all about defining terms. “In this quotation, in order to define courage, you had to first define grace.” I countered: “But I began my speech with a definition of grace.” “Yes,” he agreed, “and what did you say about it?” I said: “Grace was the ability to appear calm on the surface, even when you are churning inside.” He concluded: “I guess I was looking for a better definition of grace.”

I am not sure if my professor was making a theological statement that day, but I know his words set me on a life-long journey to better understand grace, and the connection between grace and courage.

The powerful story of the resurrection of Lazarus, in John’s gospel, is a parable of grace under pressure. But not the kind of grace that presents a calm exterior. Everyone in this story is upset, even overwrought, including Jesus. Deep grief has taken hold. But grace and courage are everywhere, as well.

Martha goes out to meet Jesus and confront him. “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Her boldness is an expression of grace under pressure. Later she says to Jesus: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”



Monday, March 30, 2020

The Courage to Practice Grace Under Pressure

by Scott Stoner

*This is God's grace for each of us, to be set free
from our fears, to find the courage to speak our
truth, to discover that courage is a gift.*

—Sam Rodman

In yesterday's reflection, Sam Rodman shared Ernest Hemingway's words: "Courage is grace under pressure." I have chosen the spirit of this quote as the theme for this week. As Sam describes so well, it takes courage to choose to respond with grace at any time, but especially when we are under the pressure of some stress or challenge.

Everyone experiences pressure, sometimes even extreme pressure, in their lives. The question is not *if* we will experience stress in our lives, but rather *how* we will choose to respond. The keyword in the previous sentence is the word *respond*. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist, wrote a highly respected book entitled *Man's Search For Meaning*, which includes this quote: "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

There is a crucial distinction between *reacting* to stress and *responding* to stress. When we merely react, we often blame the stress, or someone or something other than ourselves, for our reaction. Responding is different than reacting in that it involves our thoughtfully choosing the response we wish to make. As the quote above from Sam Rodman reminds us, God has given us the freedom to think and not merely react out of fear and stress, and to have the courage to respond with grace.

Making It Personal: Reread the quotes from Sam Rodman and Viktor Frankl. What speaks to you in each of these quotes? Can you think of times when you have handled stress by either reacting or responding? What was the difference when you were able to respond rather than react?

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

What's in Your Cup?

by Scott Stoner

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

—John 14:27

I have learned valuable lessons recently that I'd like to share with you, one from a story and one from an experience. First, the story.

You are holding a cup of coffee when someone comes along and accidentally bumps your arm, making you spill coffee everywhere. Why did you spill the coffee? Because someone bumped into you, right? Wrong answer. You spilled the coffee because *coffee* was in the cup. If tea had been in it, you would have spilled *tea*. Whatever is inside the cup is what will come out. Therefore, when life comes along and shakes you, whatever is inside of you will come out.

So each of us needs to ask ourselves, "What's in my cup?" When life gets bumpy, what spills over? Joy, gratefulness, peace, and humility? Or anger, bitterness, harsh words, and reactions? The lesson I learned was that we get to choose what's in our cup.

Another lesson learned came while I was driving. Another car cut me off in traffic without (seemingly) any awareness of my presence. I was not proud of the words that came out of my mouth, and was glad they were for my ears only in the confines of my car. This experience showed me that there is a bit too much stress and irritability in my cup right now. That day I chose to react rather than respond and wanted to blame the other driver for my reaction. But as the story points out, that's the wrong answer. The lesson learned is that I need to be more intentional about filling my cup with patience, forgiveness, and understanding.

Making It Personal: Can you think of a time when some kind of stress "bumped" you? Did grace spill out of your cup, or something else? What can you learn from your experience?



Wednesday, April 1, 2020

The Courage to Play and Be Silly

by Scott Stoner

*We don't stop playing because we grow old;
we grow old because we stop playing.*

—George Bernard Shaw

Today is April Fool's Day, an excellent day to remember the importance of play and silliness in our lives and how it contributes to our wellness. In my own life, a primary indication that I am not responding with grace is when I notice that I have lost my sense of humor.

Research has long shown the importance of laughter and play in a child's overall development and well-being, and now it is showing that the same is valid for people throughout the life cycle. The study of the role of play in adult wellness is given full attention by the *American Journal of Play*, a scholarly journal that explores the importance of play in both our workplaces and in our personal lives. As a result of this kind of attention to the importance of laughter and play, Silicon Valley start-ups are now not the only companies that are equipping their break rooms with ping pong or foosball tables. More and more companies are recognizing the positive connections between fun, play, creativity, and team building, and are building those kinds of opportunities into their workplaces.

Research also tells us that, on average, children laugh many more times a day than adults. I know the truth in this because I have two young grandsons who significantly increase my daily laugh quotient every time I am with them. Through them I am reminded that I can easily grow rigid and inflexible when I forget the importance of playing and being silly.

There are many ways that grace can be manifested in our lives and in our relationships. Today let's remember the importance of playfulness and humor as two expressions of grace.

Making It Personal: Do playfulness, laughter, and silliness come naturally for you? What do you think about the idea that humor and play are manifestations of grace? Can you think of a time when you either witnessed or experienced such grace?

Thursday, April 2, 2020

Grace in the Midst of Grief and Loss

by Scott Stoner

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing ... that is a friend who cares.

—Henri Nouwen

I once offered a series at a church, “Grace and Resilience in the Midst of Grief,” and was asked to write a description of the series for the church’s newsletter. I wrote that this series was only for those who had ever, had recently, were currently, or knew that they would be soon, experiencing some sort of loss or change. “In other words,” I said, “this series is for everyone.”

As many of us know, the weight of grief can be overwhelming. As we read in the Gospel reading for last Sunday, Mary and Martha were devastated by grief at the death of their brother, Lazarus. In its initial stages, grief can literally take our breath away. One way we can practice grace in the midst of grief is to be gentle and patient with ourselves as we begin to heal. The world will not necessarily know to extend grace to us when we are grieving, and so it is essential that we extend it to ourselves.

Even if we are not currently experiencing grief ourselves, we likely know someone who is grieving. Most people suffering grief report how alone they feel when, after the first month or two, others stop talking with them about their loss. One way we can extend grace to others is to have the courage to continue to be with and speak with them about their loss, showing them that we are comfortable with their vulnerability, even if it simply means sitting with them in their silence or tears. To offer this grace is to be the “friend who cares” that Henri Nouwen describes in the quote above.

Making It Personal: How natural is it for you to extend grace to yourself when you are experiencing grief? Can you think of a time when someone embodied grace by being the kind of friend for you that Henri Nouwen describes? Who in your life now could benefit from you being that kind of friend?



Friday, April 3, 2020

Grace in the Midst of Conflict

by Scott Stoner

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

—Winston Churchill

All relational systems experience conflict at times. Relational systems are any group of two or more people who are in an ongoing relationship, such as couples, families, work teams, congregations, friendships, etc. When relational conflict occurs, we can respond with grace, which will create the best chance of the dispute being resolved, or we can respond with judgment, pettiness, and blame, which will usually inflame the conflict.

One important principle to keep in mind during conflict is to always “keep the problem the problem,” and not make a person or persons the problem. Imagine a congregation that is experiencing a decline in membership, or a family that is experiencing division over political differences. To keep the problem the problem means that all parties involved focus on the issues at hand and not on blaming each other. In the first case, the problem is declining membership. In the second, it is the different viewpoints that are held within the family. It will not be helpful to blame a person or persons for being the problem; this will only escalate the conflict. To agree to work together on the declining membership issue, and to agree to love and respect one another in the midst of different political opinions, is to practice grace in the midst of conflict. It takes courage and strength to offer this kind of grace.

As the quote from Winston Churchill reminds us, it takes courage to listen, to overcome the need to be right, and to choose to put our energy into offering grace when we are surrounded by conflict.

Making It Personal: In general, what is your natural response when you find yourself facing conflict? Do you deny or avoid it? Do you inflame it by making others the problem? Or do you find a way to offer grace and the possibility of healing?

Saturday, April 4, 2020

Rooting Ourselves in God’s Grace

by Scott Stoner

We love because God first loved us.

—1 John 4:19

Sam Rodman inspired our theme for this week with his reflection on grace under pressure. We have explored various kinds of pressures that require us to be intentional about how we will respond with grace. We have reflected on the choice we have to respond versus react.

As people of faith, we know we are never alone in facing the pressures that come our way, and our courage to respond with grace is always grounded in God’s love and grace. As the Scripture above from 1 John says, we are able to love because God first loved us.

In order for a tree to grow and expand its branches, it must also develop and deepen its root system. The same is true for us. Any desire we have to grow and expand our capacity to practice grace under pressure will benefit significantly by our grounding (rooting) that growth in God’s grace.

A prayer for the Fifth Sunday in Lent reminds us that fixing our hearts on God’s grace will help us to face the “swift and varied changes” with grace.

Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found.

—Book of Common Prayer, p. 219

Making It Personal: What are your thoughts about the Scripture from 1 John 4:19? Do you see a connection between your ability to extend love and grace and the love and grace that God offers to you? How does the prayer at the end of the reflection speak to you?

Palm Sunday

April 5, 2020

Love Casts out Fear

by The Rev. Jenifer Gamber

Palm Sunday. A day of jarring reversals. We gather in worship, taking our place with the people who 2,000 years ago welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, the holy city and dwelling place of God. We wave palm branches crying, “Hosanna, Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.” The mood of welcome and celebration at Jesus’ triumphal entry quickly gives way to terror. Our cries of “Hosanna” turn into “crucify him” as we acknowledge our failure to follow Jesus in our own lives. We are confronted by the horror of Jesus’ death upon the cross and our own part in his death.

Jesus walked courageously to face his death in defense of the truth—the truth of the brokenness of the world, the truth of power that oppresses others, and the truth of God’s deep love for all creation. Jesus transformed a place of fear into a place of hope. Do we have the courage to live the vulnerable and authentic life that marks the call for all Christians?

To live courageously is to live as the one to whom we truly belong. Jesus knew to whom he belonged. He lived fully as God’s beloved son and it showed. Jesus was life itself and brought that life to those he met. Jesus raised the dead, cured the sick, gave sight to the blind, and fed the hungry. His actions proclaimed the nearness of God. His life threatened the way of death. We, too, belong to God. We, too, belong to a kingdom yet to be known in this world.

Author Brené Brown writes about true belonging in this way: “True belonging is ... belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness” (*The Quest for True Belonging*, p 40).

By walking the way of life and love, his place of true belonging, Jesus walked toward suffering and death. Yet, living any other way than as our



April 6, 2020

Monday of Holy Week

The Courage to Walk the Way of Love

by Scott Stoner

Jesus walked courageously to face his death in defense of the truth—the truth of the brokenness of the world, the truth of power that oppresses others, and the truth of God’s deep love for all creation.

— Jenifer Gamber

In yesterday’s reflection, Jenifer Gamber perfectly captured the contrast between walking the way of courage versus walking the way of cowardice. As she wrote, Jesus didn’t just *talk* about walking the way of courage. In the stories we retell this Holy Week, we remember that he *showed* us what it means to walk the way of courage.

And what is this way of courage? It is the way of love. It is the embodiment of the truth found in 1 John 4:18 that “love casts out fear.” Love is stronger than fear. Love is stronger than the brokenness of the world. Love is stronger than death.

While it is true that love casts out fear, it is also true that fear can cast out love. Who among us, in the midst of fear and anxiety, has not cast out love and said or done something hurtful to someone we love? As we have learned in this devotional, the commitment to practice courage does not mean we won’t ever experience fear. It means that in the face of fear, we will instead seek to respond with courage and love.

Making It Personal: Can you think of any times in your life when you experienced or witnessed both the power that love has to cast out fear, and the power that fear has to cast out love? Reread the quote above from Jenifer Gamber and notice what stands out for you.

April 7, 2020

Tuesday of Holy Week

True Belonging

by Scott Stoner

True belonging is ... belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness.

—Brené Brown

The quote from Brené Brown offers a unique perspective on what true belonging looks like. The first thing that usually comes to mind when we think about the idea of belonging is that of being a part of something. We belong to a church, a team, a family, a neighborhood, etc. To belong is to be a part of something.

The quote above reminds us that belonging also means belonging to ourselves. Being deeply connected to our authentic selves is actually a prerequisite for being more deeply connected with others. Many family therapists teach the importance of “self-definition” and how, paradoxically, having a high degree of self-definition, or clear boundaries, enhances one’s capacity to connect positively with others.

Jesus modeled the highest degree of self-definition, a self-definition that was deeply grounded in his identity as belonging to God. It is this identity, this belonging so deeply to himself and to God, that allowed him to courageously walk the path that led him to the cross.

Making It Personal: Reread the Brené Brown quote at the top of this reflection. How does it speak to you about true belonging? In what ways do you see Jesus modeling true belonging in the events of Palm Sunday and Holy Week?



April 8, 2020

Wednesday of Holy Week

The Way Of Love

by Scott Stoner

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

—Ephesians 3:17-19 (NIV)

Michael Curry, the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, along with a group of his colleagues, has created a guide for living the Christian life: *The Way of Love*. This guide outlines seven critical practices for living a life of faith: Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest. If you are not familiar with it, I encourage you to explore the many online resources that bring these seven practices to life.

In our culture, the idea of love is often talked about as a feeling. A deeper understanding of love, though, is grounded in the realization that love is first and foremost a decision, an act of faith, an act of the will. To love in the face of fear, in the face of overwhelming challenges, and even in the face of death, is to make a decision, a choice, to love. As we have learned in our journey together this Lent, this choice takes courage, ongoing courage, to choose to walk the way of love one day, one decision, at a time.

The New Testament is overflowing with teachings about the way of love. Yet no teaching is more powerful than the actions we recall this week as we walk the way of love with Jesus through Holy Week.

Making It Personal: What do you think of the idea that love is much more than a feeling, that it is a decision, a choice, a way of living? Can you think of a time when it took courage for you to walk the way of love? What did you learn from that experience?

Maundy Thursday

April 9, 2020

The Courage to Be Awkward

by The Rev. Heidi Haverkamp

The plot of Holy Week begins to pull downward, the clouds are rolling in, the cross looms in the near distance; but also, on this day, many will also begin to worry about feet. It is Maundy Thursday and the *mandatum*, or commandment of its name, is to love one another, particularly through Jesus's example of washing feet. Foot washing can feel tender, but also awkward or even gross. Whether too intimate or too weird, for most people there are more reasons not to get their feet washed than reasons to risk it.

Over ten years of parish ministry, I wore myself out coming up with ways to convince people it was worth a try: stations in the back of the church for privacy, scented water, pouring water over hands instead of feet, on and on. The new rector of my current parish opted not to do foot washing at all last year, and while part of me was disappointed, another part of me completely understood and was even a little relieved.

Foot washing requires courage, but for what, exactly? Does it invite us into exactly the kind of vulnerability and service Jesus was talking about? Or does it distract us from what Jesus was trying to teach us with a strange ritual that has little meaning in modern life? Is it a little of both?

The *mandatum* of Jesus was “Love one another, as I have loved you” (John 13:34). No matter your personal or your parish's relationship with foot washing, loving and being loved takes courage. Courage, if we follow Jesus, is not about being safe or cool and collected, or avoiding all things awkward and weird. Courage and love in Christ means taking the risk of being vulnerable and real.

Loving and being loved is awkward—as awkward as foot washing, as awkward and odd as a man holding up a piece of bread and saying, “This is my body,” as awkward as crying alone in a garden while your friends sleep, as awkward as being hung on a cross. And yet it is love, awkward

Good Friday

April 10, 2020

The Courage to Witness and Behold

by The Rev. Heidi Haverkamp

“America is the only country where more Christians go to church on Mother’s Day than Good Friday.” This quote comes from Peter Storey, a South African Methodist bishop who served as the white chaplain to Nelson Mandela and other prisoners on Robben Island, fought against apartheid, and spent several years as a professor at Duke Divinity School here in the U.S.

Honestly, I’m not sure many people go to church on either day anymore, but we Americans, it seems to me, do have a tendency to avoid and deny pain. We focus on positive thinking, hard work, and “living your best life now.” We prefer holidays that offer us fun, nostalgia, heroism, gift giving, and feasting. Good Friday offers none of those things.

Human beings, not just Americans, are experts at avoiding pain. Brené Brown writes in her second book: “Our first response to pain—ours or someone else’s—is to self-protect.” We will do just about anything to push away or circumvent feelings—ours or someone else’s—of pain, suffering, and shame. We do many foolish and harmful things to dodge it, numb it, or toss it away, like a hot potato, to someone else. But what if we could sit with those painful feelings for a while, instead of rejecting them?

On Good Friday we witness God entering pain, deeply and completely, in the person of Jesus. God willingly allowed Godself to be betrayed, abandoned, beaten, condemned, and crucified to share in—to sit with—the pain of human life alongside us.

A mentor of mine knew a pastor who was once called in the middle of the night to sit with a family whose young adult son had died of stab wounds. He sat with the parents, who were paralyzed and reeling with shock. But soon after he arrived at their home, the father turned to him with anger and outrage and asked: “Where is God, then? Doesn’t he know they killed my son?” And the pastor, his eyes filling with tears, responded, “Oh, my friend. God is here. He knows, because they killed his son, too.”

Holy Saturday

April 11, 2020

A Love We Can Count On

by The Rev. Heidi Haverkamp

Every Holy Saturday morning in one of my former parishes, as in many churches, a group of willing workers gathered to reset our sacred space from Holy Week to Easter. Soon, we'd hear vacuums roar, ladders clack, furniture groan, and flowers slosh around by the bucketful. But first, we sat in our work clothes in silence to take in the heavy pause of the tomb, the corpse, and the stone. We sat together for a moment in the empty nave and to say the Holy Saturday liturgy in the prayer book.

Of course, as we did this, we knew that Resurrection was coming soon. We could smell the heavy fragrance of lilies, waiting in their waxy boxes in the hallway. We knew that the Alleluia banner was “buried” under the choir loft and that the kids would find it the next day. We saw the full-color Easter bulletins waiting in piles by the door. We sat in that solemn pause, but we knew with our whole bodies what was coming soon.

But that is not always the case.

My father called me one Sunday before seven on a hot July morning a few years ago. He was in the ICU with my mother, who had collapsed in the middle of the night. As my husband and I drove across town to the hospital, I thought, “Today, I may become a person whose mother is dead.”

There are pauses of uncertainty and dread in human life; times we aren't sure what the ending will be or what resurrection could mean.

In the weeks following my mother's death, I felt adrift. What would come next? Who was I without my mother here on earth? Where was she, exactly? If she was “with God,” what did that mean? Did I believe in “heaven”? How could I find the courage to face so much gaping uncertainty and loss?

Easter Sunday

April 12, 2020

Courage as a Gift from God

by The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner

But now the power of Easter has burst upon us with the resurrection of Christ. Now we find in ourselves a strength which is not our own, and which is freely given to us whenever we need it.

—Thomas Merton

Today we proclaim, “Christ is Risen!” With this we are declaring that the power of death had no hold over Jesus, and that his resurrection means that the power of death has no hold over us, either.

It takes courage to believe in the truth and the power of resurrection. It takes even more courage to practice resurrection in the daily choices we make in our lives.

Throughout this devotional, we have reflected on how the choice to practice courage is almost always a choice that is made in the presence of some kind of fear. When fear is not present, we rarely talk about a choice as being courageous.

We have learned that the support of a loving community is vital in helping us to practice courage. I am grateful for the community that we have been able to form in and through this resource. And I am especially thankful for the community of the guest writers who have inspired and encouraged us with their insights on what it means to practice courage as a person of faith. Thank you to: Dominic Barrington, Teddy Brooks, Mariann Budde, Anna Courie, Jenifer Gamber, Heidi Haverkamp, Jan Kwiatkowski, and Sam Rodman.

On this Easter Sunday as we conclude our journey through Lent, we recognize the real source of our strength, the source that makes it possible for us to practice courage in the face of fear, even the fear of death. That strength, as Thomas Merton says in the quote above, is “a strength which

Quotes, Scripture & Prayers for Use During Lent

Quotes

*You don't develop courage by being happy in your relationships everyday.
You develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity.*
—Epicurus

*We may not ever understand why we suffer or be able to control the forces
that cause our suffering, but we can have a lot to say about what the
suffering does to us, and what sort of people we become because of it.*
—Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.
—Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*

*Courage: mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand
danger, fear, or difficulty.*
—Merriam-Webster Dictionary

*Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end
of the day saying (whispering), "I will try again tomorrow."*
—Mary Anne Radmacher

Courage is the power to let go of the familiar.
—Raymond Lindquist

*Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes
to sit down and listen.*
—Winston Churchill

QUOTES, SCRIPTURE & PRAYERS FOR USE DURING LENT

Courage is a heart word. The root of the word courage is cor—the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage meant “To speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart.” Over time, this definition has changed, and today, we typically associate courage with heroic and brave deeds. But in my opinion, this definition fails to recognize the inner strength and level of commitment required for us to actually speak honestly and openly about who we are and about our experiences—good and bad. Speaking from our hearts is what I think of as “ordinary courage.”

—Brené Brown

May I have the courage today / To live the life that I would love, / To postpone my dream no longer / But do at last what I came here for / And waste my heart on fear no more.

—John O’Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Invocations and Blessings*

It takes so much to be a full human being that there are very few who have the ... courage to pay the price. One has to abandon altogether the search for security and reach out to the risk of living with both arms.

—Morris West, *The Shoes of the Fisherman*

When we walk to the edge of all the light we have ... and we take a step into the darkness of the unknown, we must believe ... there will be something solid to stand on ... or we will be taught to fly.

—S. Martin Edges

One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.

—Andre Gide

We must be willing to get rid of the life we’ve planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us.

—Joseph Campbell



I must let go of everything but God

—Howard Thurman, *Deep is the Hunger*

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Scripture

I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

—Joshua 1:9

Be strong, and let us be courageous for the sake of our people, and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what seems good to him.

—2 Samuel 10:12

Be strong and of good courage, and act. Do not be afraid or dismayed; for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you, ...

—1 Chronicles 28:20

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

—Psalm 23:4

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

—Psalm 27:14

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

—Matthew 14:27

QUOTES, SCRIPTURE & PRAYERS FOR USE DURING LENT

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

—Luke 10:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

—John 14:27

[Final Messages and Greetings] Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.

—1 Corinthians 16:13

For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

—2 Timothy 1:7

Prayers

Enlightener of the Ages, your belief in us far surpassed our belief in ourselves. May we see ourselves more clearly as you see us. May we hope always in the Love that is always more than enough. May we act courageously, conscious that we can do all things because of your power within us. Like you, may we let our light shine everywhere. Amen.

Heavenly Father, I ask you to strengthen my mind, body and spirit today. When I'm weary, may I be refreshed. When I'm worn, may I be renewed. When I'm broken, may I be restored. When I'm fearful, may I become faithful. I pray that I walk in complete confidence today knowing that the Lord Almighty is with me. Amen.

—Belief.net

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference. [Amen.]*

— Reinhold Niebuhr



*In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.*

*For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.*

*It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.*

*Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.*

*Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.*

*Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you. [Amen.]*

—John O'Donohue, *For a New Beginning*

*God our judge and our teacher,
let us not waste time when the day is done
in guilt or self-reproach.
Give us rather the courage
to face whatever has been,
accept forgiveness, and move on to something better.
Amen.*

—New Zealand Prayer Book (1989)

Living Well Through Lent 2020

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

Designed for use as an individual reflection or for group study, this daily devotional provides a foundation for seeking a deeper experience of Lent, an experience that will help prepare us for the true meaning of Easter.

Includes reflections from: The Very Rev. Dominic Barrington
The Rev. Theodora Nmade Brooks
The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde
Anna Fitch Courie
The Rev. Jenifer Gamber
The Rev. Heidi Haverkamp
The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski
The Rt. Rev. Samuel Rodman
The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner

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