

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
of NORTH HOLLYWOOD

Day
by *Day*

2018 ELDER MEDITATIONS

2018 HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

Sunday, March 25 **PALM SUNDAY**

10:00 am includes Children's
Processional in the Sanctuary

We celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into
Jerusalem. Children process into the Sanctuary
with flowers and decorate his cross.

Wednesday, March 28 **MEDITATION SERVICE**

7:00 pm - 8:00 pm in the Chapel

Thursday, March 29

★ **MAUNDY THURSDAY**

6:00 pm Potluck Meal

7:00 pm Communion Service in the Social Hall

We observe the night that Jesus celebrated the
Passover. Come enjoy a potluck dinner with
communion at each table.

Friday, March 30 **GOOD FRIDAY**

PRAYER VIGIL

7:00 am to 7:00 pm in the Chapel

An open invitation to meditate and pray in
our Chapel. Come whenever you can and
stay as long as you would like.

LABYRINTH

7:00 am to 6:30 pm in the Social Hall

A walking meditative journey based on
the stations of the cross. Participants
walk at their own pace, pausing for inner
reflection as they choose.

★ **GOOD FRIDAY** **WORSHIP SERVICE**

7:00 pm in the Sanctuary

A meditative and reflective service
remembering the final moments in the
life of Jesus' earthly life.

Sunday, April 1 **EASTER SUNDAY**

WORSHIP SERVICES

- ★ 6:00 am Sunrise Service with Baptism
- 9:00 am, 11:00 am, 5:30 pm
and 7:00 pm in English
- 1:00 pm *en Español*

SUNDAY SCHOOL/CHILDCARE

9:00 am and 11:00 am

There is Sunday School and childcare
for all ages during the 9:00 am service.
Childcare only for children under 5
during the 11:00 am service.

EASTER WALK

9:00 am and 10:20 am

Walk through a dramatic presentation of the
last days of Jesus' life. 2nd – 5th graders will
participate in the Easter Walk during the 9:00
am service. Younger children are encouraged
to walk with their parents at 10:20 am when all
adults are invited to participate.
Please meet in the lobby in front of the Chapel.

EASTER BREAKFAST

7:00 am to 11:00 am

Served in the Social Hall by our youth
groups. Freewill donation.

★ **Childcare available upon request—
contact the church office at 818.763.8218.**

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH *of* NORTH HOLLYWOOD

ELDER'S ADVENT MEDITATIONS

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PREFACE

Robert M. Bock, Senior Pastor

In 1981 the popular Broadway musical *Godspell* held a tenth anniversary production featuring the original Broadway cast and director. At the time four members of that original cast were members of our church family. As a result, the stage in our Social Hall was chosen as the venue for this reunion.

Risers were built, the stage expanded and the show opened to standing room only. Twelve performances were scheduled over four weekends. Due to its popularity, the show ran for six months. The Advent Theatre had its birth in that production. Advent, a legitimate 99-seat theatre, continued actively from 1982 until 2013 when it went on hiatus.

In *Godspell* we experienced a new genre of music. One of the favorites was a simple ballad, “Day by Day,” the words attributed to Richard of Chichester in the 13th century and the music by Stephen Schwartz in 1971. We have often sung “Day by Day” as a Communion Hymn in all our worship services. Our youth know the words by heart. It is a favorite at camps and conferences. It is the only song from *Godspell* to be included in our hymnal. Most of our church family does not need to turn to page 599 to sing this hauntingly simple and beautiful song.

The Elders chose “Day by Day” as the theme for their 2018 Lenten Meditation booklet. “Day by day, day by day, O, dear Lord, three things I pray: to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day, by day, by day, by day.”

I know the daily meditations written by our Elders will be an inspiration to you as you observe the Season of Lent and prepare for the heartache of Holy Week followed by the glorious celebration of the Resurrection.

This Lenten Meditation Book is a gift from our Elders to their church family and friends.

Pastor Bob Bock



If you want to fast for Lent...

Fast from hurting words and say kind words.



ASH WEDNESDAY — FEBRUARY 14

Robert M. Bock, Senior Pastor

Today we start a six-week pilgrimage that will conclude with the glory of Easter morning. However, between today and Easter is a journey filled with adventure, heartache, triumph, miracles, and teachings that have maintained their wisdom and importance for over 2,000 years.

Ash Wednesday is not mentioned as a special day or an observance in the Bible. However, throughout the Bible we read of people sprinkling themselves with ashes to show repentance for sin. And other Biblical references speak of repentance by covering oneself in dust and ashes and fasting.

It was not until the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD that Ash Wednesday was adopted into the calendar of the Catholic Church. Emperor Constantine's goal was to combine pagans and Christians into a peaceable unit within the Roman Empire. He felt that by adopting Ash Wednesday as a "Christian" observance his goal would be accomplished. Almost 300 years passed before Pope Gregory decreed Ash Wednesday to be the first day of Lent. He also instituted the practice of marking the foreheads of worshippers with ashes in the shape of a cross.

This year's theme, "Day-by-Day," seems to define the only way we can observe Lent. Each day, Jesus began walking again toward Jerusalem. Each day, new listeners and new opportunities presented themselves. Each day, a new group of people asking to be healed appeared out of nowhere. Each day, the Disciples learned something new about the journey they were on and why Jesus had "set His face toward Jerusalem."

The journey had to be taken Day-by-Day; there was no other way!

My prayer for each of us is that as we live each day of this Holy Season we will see Him more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly. Day by Day!

Pastor Bob Bock



If you want to fast for Lent...

Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Richard Follett

An Acrostic

Dreading to go down to Jerusalem,
Already the Disciples had centered their thoughts
Yet again on the dangers their Master, this unusual Rabbi, had placed before them.

Before they could convince Him, though, to
Yield to their fears, they beheld Him leading them confidently toward the city.

Doting upon His words, rightly perceived as expanding the Word of God,
Awe filled them and overcame their fears long enough to follow Him, greatly
Yearning to emulate both His power and His compassion. They went. History shifted.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Gaye Coffman

In many churches, members give something up as part of their spiritual discipline during the season of Lent. Often, it's an indulgence like chocolate or alcohol. At our church, we are frequently encouraged to give up a bad habit rather than a physical thing or perhaps, instead, add something positive to our lives for the six weeks—prayer time or acts of kindness each day, for instance.

Several years ago, my husband, Ian, decided to give up road rage. He has a long commute, as many in our city do, and realized it didn't serve him to spend so much of his day in frustration and anger. By the time he got into work, it would take him an hour to calm down, let the drive go, and feel normal again. They say it takes 21 days to develop a new habit, so the 40ish days of Lent gave him ample time to work on his new habit. The first week wasn't easy, but he found some coping mechanisms that helped—taking favorite music along to listen to and turning up the AC if he started to feel (literally) heated. By Easter, he had well and truly given up the “rage” and he hasn't looked back since. I'm happy to report, as a frequent passenger, that he's much more relaxed and

fun to ride with these days.

During Lent, we are encouraged, day by day, to look at our lives and see where we could use some grace. Anything you choose to add or give up is wonderful as long as you are taking the journey. Even as He makes His way to the cross, Christ is with us on our path—during Lent and every day. May God bless you on your way.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Rodney Gould

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. (Psalm 56:3)

Anxiety seems to be a signature part of our lives today. Whether it is the bombardment of bad news on television, financial debts that seem insurmountable or the loss of a friendship, everything, it seems, can lead to increased anxiety.

But the Psalmist is telling us we don't have to bear anything alone. Our Bible is replete with similar exhortations about leaning on the Lord. In Hebrews 13:6 we are told, *So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"*

What can a mere mortal do to us when we have God on our side? When stress, anxiety, and fear are overtaking your life, stop and remember to put your trust in God because when He is with you, no one can harm you.

If possible, think back to the last time you were wracked with stress and anxiety over a "problem" that seemed unsolvable. Are you still feeling the same angst over that problem today? Probably not. You got through it somehow—most likely by faith in a God who will never leave you.

The Lord hasn't failed you in the past and He won't in the future. Your trust in Him is all you need. He will see you through.



If you want to fast for Lent...

Fast from anger and be filled with patience.



1ST OF 7 LENTEN SUNDAYS — FEBRUARY 18

Barbara Campbell

Turning it over in prayer...

While reaching out to a friend about prayers needed for certain serious concerns, I acknowledged that I knew I just needed to turn it over to prayer. My wise and loving friend said the best words I've heard in a long time:

"The trouble is that it's pretty hard to turn things over in prayer when you are holding your breath. That's when the sum total of my prayer is 'Please, God.'"

Please, God..... Please, God... and... Thank you.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Janet Bruce

"Day by day, by day, by day, by day."

Note that the song doesn't say all the days at once.

Simply, one day at a time—remembering that the effort is what's important.

It's not always an easy journey,
but we never make it alone.

"To see Him more clearly..."

Because He is right here with us,
every step of the way.

"To love Him more dearly..."

Knowing that He loved us enough
to die for us on a cross.

"To follow Him more nearly..."

Because He promised us
That if we would let Him into our hearts,
He would show us how to do it.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

Aliza Ramos

It's easy to recognize someone you know. You know her face or the sound of his voice, maybe even the feel of her touch or the way he walks.

How do you recognize someone you don't know? By her picture, perhaps. Or a description from someone who knows him. Maybe you can look for a particular item she may be wearing or carrying. You really have to pay attention, don't you? You have to actively search for his identifying characteristics or you may never find the person you seek.

*The man whispered, "God, speak to me."
And a meadowlark sang. But the man did not hear.*

*So, the man yelled, "God, speak to me!"
Thunder rolled across the sky. But the man did not listen.*

*The man looked around and said, "God, let me see you."
A star shone brightly. But he noticed it not.*

*And the man shouted, "God, show me a miracle."
And a life was born. But the man was unaware.*

*So, the man cried out in despair, "Touch me, God, and let me know that you are here!"
Whereupon God reached down and touched the man.
But the man brushed the butterfly away and walked on.*

(source unknown)

Do you seek God daily? Do you long to see Him more clearly? Spend time with Him. Get to know Him. It's easy to recognize someone you know.



Do you want to fast for Lent?
Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Randy Carver

Look to this day,
For it is life,
The very life of life.
In its brief course lie all
The realities and verities of existence,
The bliss of growth,
The splendor of action,
The glory of power—
For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision,
But today, well lived,
Makes every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day. –Sanskrit Proverb

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Gerianne McIntosh

Time Stewardship

Each morning as I begin my day, I read scripture from the *New Spirit-Filled Bible*, a study bible. There are brief paragraphs titled “Kingdom Dynamics” throughout which help me to meditate and understand the scripture meaning more clearly. The paragraph at the beginning of Psalm 90 caught my eye. It stated in bold print: “Time is short, Use it well, Stewardship.” I stopped and read it again. The statement hit me hard. In that moment, I felt that God said the me, “Time Stewardship, not Time Management!” Wow!

Since that morning in early January of this year, I have had to ask myself, am I being a good steward of my time? How was I spending the hours of each day? The answers were not easy. I was letting my calendar, filled with work, family, home, and life responsibilities, run my days. While I started my days with God and in prayer, I was only squeezing Him in throughout the day, a quick

prayer here and there, especially when I was running short on time or patience. I thought I was managing my time, but my calendar was managing me. I was not being a good steward of my time.

I have vowed in 2018 “day by day” that I will be better at time stewardship. I will be taking more time to pray and listen to God, to have a heart of gratitude for all of God’s blessings, and to spend more time with my beautiful family.

And during this season of Lent, I will be focusing on the teachings of Jesus.

How will you be spending your days?

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Anna Sigala

I recently had a minor procedure done at Providence St. Joseph Hospital. The night before, I was very anxious about the procedure and prayer was the only thing that went through my mind to ease my thoughts. In the morning, I woke up and did not say much to my family. I found that prayer was the constant background melody playing in a loop to reassure me that all would be fine.

As the staff rolled me into the operating room, I was met with a lovely group of nurse angels that made me feel safe and warm. I again began to pray “Lord, clear the minds of these doctors; guide the hands of this surgeon. Keep this room warm with your love so everyone feels your presence. I trust in you and believe in the outcome that everything will be what will be. Amen.”

Prayer is such a big part of my life. It is so I can try to

See thee more clearly
Love thee more dearly
And follow thee more nearly,
words to keep close to my heart.



If you want to fast for Lent...
Fast from grudges and be reconciled.



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Gaye Coffman

This oft-reprinted New Year's column by Dear Abby (the late Pauline Phillips) is adapted from the original Al-Anon credo and is always worth re-sharing:

JUST FOR TODAY: I will live through THIS DAY ONLY. I will not brood about yesterday or obsess about tomorrow. I will not set far-reaching goals or try to overcome all of my problems at once. I know that I can do something for 24 hours that would overwhelm me if I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

JUST FOR TODAY: I will be happy. I will not dwell on thoughts that depress me. If my mind fills with clouds, I will chase them away and fill it with sunshine.

JUST FOR TODAY: I will accept what is. I will face reality. I will correct those things that I can correct and accept those I cannot.

JUST FOR TODAY: I will improve my mind. I will read something that requires effort, thought, and concentration. I will not be a mental loafer.

JUST FOR TODAY: I will make a conscious effort to be agreeable. I will be kind and courteous to those who cross my path, and I'll not speak ill of others. I will improve my appearance, speak softly, and not interrupt when someone else is talking. Just for today, I will refrain from improving anybody but myself.

JUST FOR TODAY: I will do something positive to improve my health. If I'm a smoker, I'll quit. If I am overweight, I will eat healthfully—if only just for today. And not only that, I will get off the couch and take a brisk walk, even if it's only around the block.

JUST FOR TODAY: I will gather the courage to do what is right and take responsibility for my own actions.

2ND OF 7 LENTEN SUNDAYS — FEBRUARY 25

Jay Aldrich

Not a day goes by but that I get some flashback on important days in my life. God has always said bless all the creatures big and small, and reflecting on this I thought of the special day years ago when I worked at the New England Aquarium as Director of Group and Customer Service and

as a Diver.

We got a call from Woods Hole on the Cape that they had discovered a fairly newborn sperm whale with the parents nowhere to be found. A rescue of this type had never taken place before, but we said we had to give it a try. So off we went to Cape Cod to rescue this baby sperm whale, bring it back to Boston, and put it in a huge tank in the back portion of the Aquarium. We had no trouble getting it in the net, onto the barge, and into a special tank in the truck and off we went.

The team of experts knew this baby had to keep moving 24 hours a day. It was difficult to figure out exactly how old this specimen was, but he was beautiful. As I volunteered to be a walker, I got into my wet suit as the water was very cold in the open tank. As I put my arm around this baby, I literally started to cry. Holding such a creature close to me as I started to walk it in circles around the tank and hearing it making cute whale sounds just broke my heart knowing that this was probably not going to end well. We next had to figure out a formula to force feed it as they nurse for up to a year. We did the best that we could following the experts and we walked and cared for this beauty for almost 3 weeks 24 hours a day, but, alas, it developed pneumonia and passed.

I will never forget this day as one of the most rewarding in my life to experience this massive mammal and to hug it, talk to it, and try to reassure it that it was truly a gift from God. I know he is swimming in heaven now, and I look forward to hugging him again.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Sheryl Fitzpatrick

Although I have always believed in God, my commitment to organized religion has wavered from time to time.

During my childhood and depending on which relative I wanted to tag along with, I was introduced to several different religions. It started with my father's mother (Texas born and bred) who was a very active member of the Pentecostal Church. What I remember about that experience is very long Sunday services, great music, fear of God and a lot of do not rules. Next, it was my mother's father and the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Needless to say, it was a little subdued for me coming from my Grandmother's church. When I was about 12, my mother's brother, a Jehovah's Witness, had twin girls whom I babysat and adored. I then started going with them to their meetings. Then as a teenager with a best friend who was Catholic, guess where I went? As an adult, I still wandered from church to church never finding a home.

FCCNH is the first church I officially joined, and with Pastor Bob and Pastor Louise by my side, on Easter Sunday, April 5, 2016, at 6:00 AM here at First Christian Church of North Hollywood (Disciples of Christ), I was baptized.

My faith is growing—
“Day by Day”

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Randy Carver

Today Is Now

Now is Today.

We cannot eat tomorrow's breakfast today,
it hasn't been served yet.

We cannot eat yesterday's breakfast today,
we already ate that.

We can only Live in the Now,
which is Today.

We can only serve now.

We can only act now,
we can only give now.

We can only love now, in this moment.

Tomorrow might be too late,
and remember, it is always much later than we think.

Love, Randy



If you want to fast for Lent...

Fast from worries and have trust in God.



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Barbara Campbell

Eighteen years ago, I had an opportunity to help open and direct a new preschool at Church of the Valley in Van Nuys. My background and administrative abilities were sketchy at best. I had been an actress for 20 years and had “fallen” into teaching preschool. It was never part of my plan. I had been teaching preschool for 7 years. That was it...the sum total of my experience. Yes, I had the necessary coursework but absolutely no experience that would have indicated my having the ability to run a school. The COV Executive Board met with me. Pastor Larry Keene was the Senior Minister. As we talked, I decided I needed to be frank. I told them that I knew I would make mistakes. I’d never done this before. I had tried to learn from Betty, our former Director, a woman who had successfully run the preschool for over 30 years before she retired. But I was green. I told the board that I would understand if they wanted to look at other candidates. I knew that opening a school was a huge and expensive undertaking.

I will never forget the words Pastor Keene said to me after I spoke. He looked at me, smiled, and said, “Well, Barbara, I expect Betty had a first year too.” Even now when I think of that statement of faith, I well up. To have someone believe in me enough to trust me with helping to build a school, well, it was extraordinary.

I am still the Director of Church of the Valley Preschool. We began with 27 children and now have 60. Our program is thriving. But this school’s creation was rooted in faith and belief. We took it one day at a time, one meeting at a time, one permit at a time, simply, one task at a time. And, boy, it felt good.

THURSDAY, MARCH 1

Bryan Zavala

It’s true what they say about raising kids: it all goes by way too quickly. I thought it was just an overused cliché, but now that my kids are 10 and almost 13, I am a believer. What’s more terrifying and sadder to me is that my oldest, Lucy, is less than 6 years away from possibly leaving the nest, with Noah just 2 ½ short years behind.

If I dwell on these numbers too long, a cloud of anxiety and depression starts to hover over me. So, I choose to live in the present as much as I can. Especially when it comes to my kids, I try

to be as present in their lives as much as I can, even with all the distractions that life can serve up. I watch my kids grow as I would watch the grass grow, day by day. It lasts longer that way. And it also makes for a fuller and richer “Dad Experience.” I try to take the same basic approach to my marriage and life in general.

Even if I don’t always succeed, God has a way of nudging me back on track and I am very thankful for that.

FRIDAY, MARCH 2

Morgan Stoddard

Martin was always considered by most to be a deep thinker. His father was a copper miner and his mother a homemaker. He was always interested in theology and philosophy but he entered law school to please his father. His interest in law waivered and he was soon drawn back to his true interest of studying the great philosophers and theologians. Thus began the controversial journey of Martin Luther as German professor, theologian, composer, priest, monk, and a major figure in the Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible into the German vernacular (instead of Latin) made it more accessible to the laity and had a great impact on all churches. His hymns influenced the development of singing in church. He believed that salvation and eternal life are not earned by good deeds but are the gift of God’s grace for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther was a controversial theologian because of his unacceptance of some other religious doctrines, but his day by day devotion to the Bible and his faith created much of what has made our modern-day churches. His most famous hymn is “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” and one of the stanzas is:

*But there is one, who takes our side,
The one of God’s own choosing,
You ask who that may be.
Christ Jesus that is he, with mighty powers to save
Victorious o’er the grave, Christ will prevail triumphant.*

May all of us share the true meaning of the Lenten Season and be thankful for what the Protestant Reformation accomplished. May God bless and keep you always.

SATURDAY, MARCH 3

Loydi Rivas

Let Us Rejoice Day by Day

Este es el Día que hizo Jehová; nos gozaremos y alegraremos en Él.

Salmo 118:24 Reina—Valera 1960)

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

(Psalm 118:24 ESV)

This very Scripture is one of my most preferred; it is constantly in my mind making me remember that the Grace of the Lord is in our lives, and that anything surrounding us is a gift from Him. Even when is not too good, it is in our good. That is what the Scriptures says; *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose* (Romans 8:28).

So, when I feel things are not working well, I can rely on His promises that everything will be OK. Then I can enjoy and rejoice for my day by understanding it is the day that the Lord has made for me so I can give him the Glory and Worship.

May God bless your day! Today and always!

3RD OF 7 LENTEN SUNDAYS — MARCH 4

Sally Hallada

One of my top five favorite movies is *Groundhog Day*. That is something to say because I've watched a lot of movies. The 1993 comedy starring Bill Murray is the story of a very selfish and flawed man who wakes up every morning to live the same day with "I Got You, Babe" playing on the clock radio until he figures out Life! (Spoiler Alert—he does and wins the heart of the girl.)

What is powerful about the movie is that we can relate to all of his stages when faced with drastic change. First, he's in denial and doesn't want to believe it. Then he's angry by being even more obnoxious to everyone. He then tries to make it work to his advantage by manipulation and trying to regain control. After he's unable to win the girl this way, he slips into a depression, feeling hopeless that things will never change—it's all about him. He's pulled out of the depression when

he finds a homeless man dying in an alley. Day after day he tries unsuccessfully to find a way to keep him from dying, realizing that he's not the one in control. He then finds people he can help until he's the most popular guy in Punxsutawney and all for the right reasons!

I love this movie because it makes me think about what I would do if I had all that time to work on myself. Would I master the saxophone, read all of the classics, become a master chef and deepen my Faith? But the real truth is that we do have that time. Every day we're given the amazing gift of time to grow into the person we want to be and help those in our path. Every day, it's Groundhog Day!

MONDAY, MARCH 5

Gerianne McIntosh

"Day by Day" is one of my favorite songs. I remember the first time I heard it. I was watching *Godspell*, and it was so uplifting, I felt true joy! The lyrics were so simple and the melody was happy. I replayed it over and over in my mind and bought the recording right away.

I played it for weeks or maybe months. It made me feel so good. I am grateful that to this day I feel that joy and happiness every time I hear it.

The lyrics are a prayer that challenges and inspires me.

Day by day

Day by day

O dear Lord

Three things I pray

To see thee more clearly

Love thee more dearly

Follow thee more nearly

Day by day

During this season of Lent, I pray that each of us will feel the joy of seeing more clearly, loving more dearly, and following Jesus more nearly. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 6

Janet Bruce

Of the three prayer points in the song “Day by Day,” the two I struggle with most are “to see Thee more clearly” and to “follow Thee more nearly.” I suspect I am not alone in that.

I easily embrace to “love Thee more dearly.” I make no secret that I don’t always agree with the answers to my prayers. I need—and have always felt I had—room to disagree, especially when the answers have to do with those I love. But faith itself has never been a question. I’ve just always known that God and His Son love me and are here with me. That means a lot to me.

As far as seeing Him more clearly goes, however, I really think a good neon sign would help sometimes—with big, clear letters saying, “Do this” or “Here it is,” and bright arrows pointing me in the right direction. It would help me avoid a lot of the blind alleys I get myself into.

Following Him more nearly is often my nemesis. I learned long ago in Sunday School about Jesus and how He showed people how to practice kindness, and generosity, and love. I learned how He cared for others, even when they might be different or unkind in return.

Regrettably, knowing and doing have often been two very different things for me. I suspect I am not alone in that, either. It’s a challenge that hasn’t become much easier with age. At the same time, however, I do see ever more fully that the goal is worthwhile: To see Him more clearly, to love Him more dearly—and, continuing the journey together, to follow Him more nearly.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7

Fred Sloan

As we go through life, each of us has our good days and bad. Each of us has our good months and not so good months. Our years can also follow in the same pattern, as does our faith journey. All we can do is carry on from day to day and year to year, and hope that our faith increases in the process.

Difficult times arise in our lives and our relationships and we begin to wonder, has our God forsaken us? Then we turn a corner and we ask if we really deserve all the blessings that have been bestowed upon us. Why are we the lucky ones who have enough to eat, a steady job, a roof over our heads, and friends and family who love us?

We go on from day to day and seldom think about all the blessings that we have received. Have we earned this? Maybe! Have we been grateful? Hopefully! Will we continue to be this fortunate? That would be good! But, as Easter Sunday approaches, we know Someone died for us and that those who follow His teachings and believe in Him shall be received in Heaven. So, we go on, from day to day.

THURSDAY, MARCH 8

Richard Follett

Those of us who lived through the 1994 Northridge Earthquake here in the Valley very well remember the terror when it hit at 4:31 a.m. and those seemingly innumerable aftershocks that went on for several days. As a Michigander, it was my first major earthquake.

What I could not understand at the time was the number of deaths that came *after* the quake was over, deaths, I am told by my medical friends, truly from an overabundance of adrenaline flooding the body and killing from the fear itself. My Marine Corps self just could not contemplate this for the longest time. If we survived the quake, why allow the continuation of fear to dominate? I needed more empathy, more understanding of how others can be consumed with fears.

From the scriptures, we read over and over: “Be not afraid”—told to us so often by patriarchs, prophets, psalmists, angels, Jesus, and even God directly. This demonstrates that fear certainly is a fundamental human emotion, nothing to be minimized by former Marines! Yet the admonition “Be not afraid” lets us know that action in the face of fearful circumstances is one way to overcome the fear itself. Just keep doing one’s duty; just keep on keeping on. One day at a time. Day by day things do work out in God’s good time, and our trust in that very action, that process of following God, can diminish the adrenaline overload, can allow us to overcome the supposedly impossible circumstances that confront us.

Day by day, through Jesus’ example, along with the patriarchs, prophets, psalmists, and angels guiding us, we can become the full disciples Christ calls us to be. “Be not afraid.” God is with us.



If you want to fast for Lent...

Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.



FRIDAY, MARCH 9

Aliza Ramos

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (James 4:8a)

Andy Rooney said, “Everyone wants to live on top of the mountain, but all the happiness and growth occurs while you’re climbing it.” I’m glad to know this. Because I’m pretty sure I’m still climbing.

I’ve always been a destination person. I find it difficult to enjoy or appreciate the journey to where I want to go, because I just want to get there. I think about being there and what will happen there and what I would do there and that just makes me want to skip here to go right there.

The problem with skipping here to get there is that God meets me here. Here, in the present. Here, in His presence. God is with me on my journey. He’s not waiting for me at my destination.

In climbing my own mountain, I know this to be true: God is climbing, too. He is near when I need Him. He is here because I need Him. I know some people think that when they go through hard times God has abandoned them. Destination people think that. They look up towards the mountaintop to find Him and are disappointed He isn’t there.

I realize now that a relationship with God develops on the climb. I sense His peace in my pain. I feel His presence in my loneliness. I receive the fullness of His love in the depth my emptiness. I experience the joy of getting closer to Him as we climb together.

Yes, I’m still climbing. And He’s still here.

SATURDAY, MARCH 10

Alfredo Gómez

Be the Instrument

One of my teachers shared his philosophy about the people who love to make our days difficult. He said when he is interacting with that type of person he likes to face them and let them know how important they are in his life, assuring them that they are God’s instruments for him. When they ask why he is saying such thing, his answer is, God is using you to model my personality!

That indeed was one of the biggest lessons I learned about Jesus' words:

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:29, ESV)

How important it is to be gentle and humble! If we do so, we will be led to what Jesus describes as a new commandment: *that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-36, ESV)*

Let's do it! Let us be instruments of God. Day by day, not the ones who give hard times to others, but the ones who love others as Jesus taught us to do, the ones who are gentle and humble when daily life's challenges come to us. If we remain that way, we will find rest for our souls and for our emotions, and we will be at peace within us, with God, with the world.

May God's peace be with you day by day in your journey of faith.

4TH OF 7 LENTEN SUNDAYS — MARCH 11

Sally Hallada

I'm a big believer in the power of Al-Anon. Walking into my first meeting four years ago, it wasn't at all what I expected. My understanding was it was a way to support the person in your life suffering from addiction—your qualifier. I must admit that at first, I wished I didn't have to go because I didn't have the problem. Or so I thought... Within a few meetings it became painfully obvious that it was for me and that what everyone was sharing was exactly what I needed to hear. I also found out that I had three qualifiers and they needed my compassion. My children are the first to say that they've noticed a change; I'm much more understanding and relaxed. I've learned to be grateful for each day and all that God gives us. With our busy lives, it's not as easy as it sounds to do. With Al Anon, I have been given some of the tools I use in my life. Here is one of the daily meditations that spoke to me:

If I am alive then I need to look around me and feel thankful for the gifts that are mine. There is so much to be grateful for if I am willing to consider the blessings I already have. There is a wisdom in gratitude because what I focus on with appreciation has a way of expanding in my life. If I erase my blessings, I don't feed them with the grace of gratitude. If I give thanks for them, I show the creative force that brings forth all good things that I am worthy enough to appreciate what has been so generously given to me. I know enough to say thank you. (Tian Dayton, Ph.D.)

MONDAY, MARCH 12

Rev. Louise Sloan Goben, Associate Pastor

There is a billboard that I see frequently in my daily driving pattern. It reads: “Someday you WILL meet God.” The graphic shows an EKG pattern that flatlines, indicating that there is no longer a heartbeat. The message suggests to me that the only way or the only time we will meet God is when we die. I don’t agree with that assumption.

I am actually writing this a few days after Christmas, with the glow of candlelight still warming my heart as we proclaim, “Joy to the World! The Lord is come!” In our Christmas celebration, we have welcomed Emanuel—God is With Us (Matthew 1:23). God is not far off—God is immediate. God is right here/right now. A Christian should never think that the only way we can meet God is to die and go to heaven. God is not far away or, someday....

When Moses asked God who it is that is sending him back into Egypt, the name that God offers is, “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14). The English transliteration of this comes to us as YHWH and it is a name that is so holy it was never intended to be spoken. Many Biblical interpreters think that the sound of YHWH is intended to imitate the sound of our breathing—our inhaling and our exhaling—“Yah” (indrawn breath) and “Weh” (releasing your breath.) God is as close to us our breathing!

We meet God every day. Or maybe it is more accurate to say that God meets us with every breath we take. There is no waiting for a day of reckoning. God is with us.

TUESDAY, MARCH 13

Jeremy Scripter

All of the time sitting at a computer finally caught up to me, and a couple years ago I went to the eye doctor and was prescribed glasses. The first thing I noticed when driving was how three-dimensional the road looked. When going down a straight stretch, the lights and mountains in the far distance seemed to pop out and come to life instead of just blending into one layer.

I had to wonder was there a point I saw like this without glasses? If so, I am sure it was a subtle decline over the years that I never noticed. Needless to say, it was nice to see clearly again.

I think this is what happens when we grow distant from God. Most of us don’t

intentionally go away from Him but as the day-to day life stuff comes up we get distracted and, at an almost imperceptible rate, inch further and further away from Him. So, how do we see God clearly again and draw close to Him? Hebrews 10:22 says, *let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

When I feel distant, I try and see God clearly by remembering I am loved and that God is love. I know if I can come to God sincerely and humbly, He will help me get close to Him again and renew my spirit.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14

Bryan Zavala

As I am about to embark on my 18th year of sobriety, it is vital that I remind myself, or am reminded by others, that if I am going to keep my sobriety and get through this life with peace, happiness, and serenity, then I must take things as they come, one day at a time. Life is filled with adversity and challenges that may seem insurmountable. I find myself feeling overwhelmed all the time. My default setting for any really big problem I encounter is to assume that the solution will take ‘forever’ to be reached. What helps me in these moments is to remember not to look at the enormity of a situation but rather break it down into little pieces and tackle each piece at a time. When I decided to quit drinking and later smoking (several times), the words “I can never do this ever again!” rang loudly in my head. They came very close to making me want to give up. These words had to be expelled immediately and be replaced with a faith that God will never give me more than I can handle at any given moment.

We are blessed with the gift of today. Tomorrow isn’t a guarantee. When I wake up each morning, I humbly ask God to get me through the day and when I’m feeling really overwhelmed, I ask Him to take over; that His will be done. If I can do that, I know I’ll make it through the end of the day with a sense of calm, and before I shut my eyes, I remember to thank Him, so that I may see Him more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly.



If you want to fast for Lent...
Fast from pressures and be prayerful.



THURSDAY, MARCH 15

Jeremy Gillett, Director of Youth Ministries

We all have different experiences as we endure the journey of life. Our individual journeys allow us to be molded into who we are and who we shall become. We are all unique in our own way, and it is this uniqueness which highlights the love and care God has for all of us. But through our individuality, God created bridges for us to cross which provide experiences of commonality. Thus, we find common ground through conversations of parenting, coping with the loss of loved ones, the journey of finding new beginnings, being providers for our loved ones, and many other through-lines of life.

While standing on these bridges, I believe we experience the presence of God. All of who we are is welcomed on that bridge, and it is not the differences which become the focal point, but rather the similarities of humanity: the similarities of wanting to be accepted, loved, and having a voice that matters.

- It's the similarity of being knocked down but having the faith that Christ's vision for us is not to stay down but get up and share our testimony to draw others unto Him.
- It's the similarity of having no control over bad or good health that may find its way into our life but having the resolve to lean on a higher power to see us through.
- It's the similarity in our outlook that despite our financial circumstances, social status, and life experiences that we are not in control but mere vessels used to lift up the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus who is the Christ.

Let us walk Day by Day with Christ at the head of our lives.

FRIDAY, MARCH 16

Barbara Campbell

As I sit here, writing this meditation, it is just after New Year's. My husband asked me if I had any New Year's resolutions. My answer was, "Yes, the same ones I have every year." And, it's true. My resolutions never change much. I am, if nothing else, consistent. Each year, I resolve to be healthier, to eat better, be more physically active, be more organized, be kinder, be more patient, enjoy the here and now, seek out new experiences, spend time with my kids and grandchildren, etc.

I expect my resolutions are shared by many. I recognize that I tend to add more things than I

will probably accomplish, but I'm okay with that. I like to aim high. And, I like making resolutions. It is the ultimate example of "Hope springs eternal!"

Being hopeful is a positive thing. It means you have faith. You're still in there trying to do better. I think God wants us to be the best we can be. He is like our continual cheerleader, in our corner, always on our side. I think He wants us to try to be healthy and happy. And, I believe God has expectations of us to be kind, caring, and compassionate.

We are all human and we all have moments when we fall short. But, we can resolve to at least try. And so, I will continue to make my resolutions. And I will work on them, day by day.

SATURDAY, MARCH 17

Richard Follett

In 1972-73, while stationed at El Toro Marine Base, I attended Robert Schuller's Garden Grove Community Church (which later became The Crystal Cathedral). He told this story one Sunday morning.

During His three years of active ministry, Jesus found that He simply could not be everywhere at once. There were simply too many demands, too many needs, too many people who needed Him. So, He conceived of a unique way of riding Himself of the confines of His earthly body while yet retaining the Spirit: He accepted the painful death of crucifixion to allow His followers actually to become His hands and His feet through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and, thereby, expand His ministry into all the world.

Day by day, we are to be Christ on earth for those around us, acting just as Jesus would act in the same circumstances. WWJD*? (Humbling, eh?)

*WWJD: What Would Jesus Do



If you want to fast for Lent...

Fast from bitterness and fill your heart with joy.



Aliza Ramos

In his 2014 commencement speech to the University of Texas at Austin, US Navy Admiral William H. McRaven advises the graduates, “If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.” He explains that by accomplishing this first task of the day, you will be encouraged to do another, and another, which will lead to many tasks being completed by the end of the day.

I think it’s admirable to want to change the world. But what if changing the world begins with changing your heart? What would be your first task of the day?

I begin each day by saying good morning to God. I tell Him I love Him and I say thank you for the blessings I’ve received and the blessings to come. Over the years, this one small daily task has changed my relationship with God. And God has changed my heart.

The Admiral went on to say that making your bed will “reinforce the fact that the little things in life matter.” I think little moments in life matter most, especially when spending time with someone you love. There is pleasure in simply being present.

If you have twenty minutes to invest, the Admiral’s entire speech is excellent. I will borrow a few more seconds here. “And if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made... And a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better.” My morning conversations with God help me approach each day with kindness and grace. I wish I could say I get through the entire day in this manner. Some days this changed heart reminds me that I am still human. But however the day may end, when I come home to my bed (which I make every morning) I know there is peace in His presence and hope in a better tomorrow.



Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

ISAIAH 58:6



MONDAY, MARCH 19

Jeremy Gillett, Director of Youth Ministries

Day by day we should march towards equality.

Day by day we should work towards peace.

Day by day we should share the gift of love.

Day by day we should advocate for the oppressed.

Day by day we should talk with our Heavenly Father.

Day by day we should forgive those who have wronged us.

Day by day we should strive for peace with our enemy.

Day by day we should be beacons of hope for our family and community.

Day by day we will face difficulties.

Day by day we shall overcome hardships.

Day by day doubters will doubt.

Day by day believers should make a stand.

Day by day we should hold onto the promise that Jesus is coming again.

Day by day the darkness will come but the sun will shine again.

Day by day we should not worry because the Lord walks with us.

And if we live day by day in God's name giving God all the honor and glory, one day God will say: "Job well done, my good and faithful servant."

TUESDAY, MARCH 20

Loydi Rivas

ONLY THAT

One day at a time, sweet Jesus

That's all I'm asking from You

Just give me the strength to do every day

What I have to do

Yesterday's gone, sweet Jesus

And tomorrow may never be mine

Lord, help me today, show me the way

One day at a time

Isn't a beautiful hymn? Certainly it is!

This piece of worship music makes me think of the importance of living day by day, knowing that the past is over. It doesn't have anything to do any more, we can't stay there, and if anything happens and makes us feel trapped, we must move on. It is not easy if we try by ourselves, but we can remember the Scriptures as we read in Lamentations 3:22-23: *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness* (ESV).

Let's rejoice knowing that our good Lord will help us to live one day at a time.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21

Jeremy Scriptor

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
2 Corinthians 5:17

On the last day of third grade, our class decided to celebrate with a pizza party. This would normally be incredible news but I was deathly allergic to dairy and not very excited about it. When the order was placed, someone forgot to order food for me. Wanting to be like everyone else, I peeled the cheese off the pizza and celebrated.

Well, I did end up getting the excitement I was after. Unfortunately, cheese does not come off pizza very easily and I had to take an ambulance ride to the hospital. After treatment, I was ok but have since been very good about avoiding dairy.

A couple months ago I went in for an allergy test to see if my allergies have changed. I didn't have a specific reason; I just thought it would be good to know. After skin tests, blood tests, and a clinical test, I was told I no longer had a dairy allergy. I was in complete shock as had I spent all of my life avoiding chocolate, ice cream, and cheese.

The doctor asked me when my last bad reaction was and I told him in 2009. So apparently at some point in the last eight years my body decided it was time to enjoy Doritos, fancy chocolate, and Cookies and Cream ice cream. A part of me had to wonder how long ago could I have eaten dairy?! At the same time, I wondered if I hadn't randomly decided to get tested how much longer would I have gone without knowing.

I can't tell you why I got tested. Something just told me to. And after all of this I can't help but think of the above verse. It is very easy to get locked in to our daily routine and to think we are the

same as we have always been. This is simply not true though. Every day is a new opportunity and at any point Christ can transform us into a new creation.

THURSDAY, MARCH 22

Anna Sigala

I often think about my father's upbringing and what it was like working on a farm in Mexico. At a young age, my father was left to tend the animals and work the fields. My father recently told us a story that his parents would bring him flour, sugar, and oil. Those supplies were meant to last him one week before they would return with more.

One weekend, my father's younger brother decided to stay for the week. He was curious and wanted to see what his older brother was up to living 100 miles from home alone. My father kept up with daily chores and worked the land with his brother at his side. He was very creative with meals but my uncle had no patience for the survival skills needed to stay out on the ranch. When their parents returned for him one week later, he was the first to jump into the truck to return home.

My father laughed as he told the story.

I cannot imagine what it was like, the hardships he endured and the loss of not having his family around.

My father maintains a deep faith and I suppose life events ground you so that faith and prayer are essential.

FRIDAY, MARCH 23

Jay Aldrich

Every day of our lives we are given different paths to explore and, depending on the path we choose and what day it is, these paths can make your life great or with many obstacles in the road as they say. Having had to make many choices in the paths my life has taken has made me stronger each day in my paths chosen. Sometimes I have taken the easy path knowing that it will probably not be the best choice. Other times I have taken the more difficult path knowing that I will come out stronger having learned new lessons on the way.

We all make good and bad choices in our lives and we learn how to cope with these. I have been so fortunate to have been brought up as a young child to appreciate life, animals, and be sure always to give back.

No place has been more important to me upon my present path as my church and church family. Bob and I did not choose this path that we are on now, but with the support of all our church family, especially Pastor Bob, we are making the correct choices in our lives no matter how much time we have left.

We all have to make a difference especially as the world is today. So, in your daily routine when you have to choose which path to take, analyze, think carefully, and step forward knowing that God has your back and so does your church family.

God bless you all for being there.

SATURDAY, MARCH 24

Morgan Stoddard

The famous American essayist and lecturer Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Do not go where the path may lead you, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

Jesus is said to have traveled some 3000 miles during the three years of His earthly ministry. He obviously had gone down many paths previously traveled but day by day He left a “new trail” through His teachings, healings, and the miracles of His selfless giving. It is also believed that Jesus traveled some 21,000 miles from His birth to His death on the cross. What an amazing journey without trains, planes, oh, and yes even Uber. Jesus walked day by day to spread the gospel that changed the world.

May each of us strive to do the same thing with our journey, especially during the Lenten season. May God bless you and keep you and your family this Easter season and always.

Reminder: Please see the Holy Week Planning Schedule inside the front cover for the coming week’s activities.

6TH OF 7 LENTEN SUNDAYS (PALM SUNDAY) — MARCH 25

Richard Follett

An Acrostic

Dreading the journey ahead of them,
Almost all of the disciples (except Thomas) were filled with
Yearnings for safety, for comfort, for security.

But Jesus, knowing what must be coming,
Yet led them down from Galilee through Samaria toward that teeming, threatening city.

Daring to enter on a humble colt through the Golden, Blessèd Gate as the Shekhinah*
Accepting His mission and fate with shimmers of divine grace, Jesus
Yielded His earthly life and guided us to the Kingdom of Heaven already within us.

*“The **Shekhina(h)** (also spelled **Shekina(h)**, **Shechina(h)**, or **Shechina(h)**) (Biblical Hebrew: שכינה) is the English transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “dwelling” or “settling” and denotes the dwelling or settling of the divine presence of God. The Shekhinah is the feminine aspect of Divinity, also referred to as the Divine Presence” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*.

MONDAY, MARCH 26

Aliza Ramos

Then [Jesus] said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

I made a promise to God when I was young. I meant it when I made it. I really wanted to do something good for God. Can I be honest with you? As life challenged my resolve, I kept asking God over and over again if He really wanted me to keep my promise. Okay, maybe it was more like, “Do I really have to keep this promise?” And, occasionally, “How long do you want me to suffer?”

I have come to realize that doing good work is not a direct path to joyfulness and jubilation. There are detours through hardship and heartache along the way. It is not the way of the world to choose holiness over happiness or sacrifice over satisfaction. But it is the way of Jesus.

As followers of Jesus, we know His way is not easy. Easy requires no courage. Easy doesn't lead to growth. Easy diminishes the joy of victory. If easy were our way, we would miss the intimacy of walking closely with the One who truly knows what it means to take up the cross and walk the walk.

Since I'm being honest with you, I don't mind telling you that when I made my promise to God, I thought it would be easy to keep. So far, it has been a lot harder than I ever imagined it would be. I had not intended to choose a path for myself that would lead to suffering. But I am grateful I did. Because it brought me closer to the One who suffered for me.

TUESDAY, MARCH 27

Fred Sloan

As Jesus faced Jerusalem in his last days, He went forward knowing the end of his life on earth was coming to a close. He knew that the end would be painful and unpleasant. He knew that he would be leaving his disciples behind to complete his work without him.

It must have been difficult for Him to keep moving forward to the fate before him. But, day after day He kept going:

giving hope to the hopeless,
giving faith to the faithless,
instructing his followers as to the way to live a life worth emulating, and
showing us a way to live, from day to day, down through the ages.

Two thousand years later, we are still trying to live up to those teachings. It's not easy, but nobody ever promised us easy. Nobody ever promised Jesus easy, either! Maybe that's why being a Christian can be so rewarding. We have to work at it, day by day.



If you want to fast for Lent...

Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28

Alfredo Gómez

Every Morning, Every Night

Cada mañana al despertar, y por la noche al descansar, agradezco tus bondades a mi vida por todo lo que me permites disfrutar (Every morning upon waking up, and in the night at resting time, I am thankful for your kindness to my life, for all You let me enjoy in daily life).

This Jesus Adrian Romero song is one of those that makes me think profoundly about all that we enjoy day by day. There are times that hardship comes to us, that look like we are in the darkest moment of our life, and that whatever we do is not enough or good enough to get through it, but then we realize that it is not what we do, but His grace, His goodness, His love, His mercy, His greatness, His faithfulness, and His kindness that make us and our lives better.

The Scriptures say, *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

As Jesus' followers, by doing that we can understand how good He is to us! Day by day in our daily life. Amen.

MAUNDY THURSDAY — MARCH 29

Sheryl Fitzpatrick

Walking the Labyrinth and Praying the Scriptural Stations of the Cross

The stations of the Cross have been an important devotion used in Lent for about 800 years, a means of enabling Christians who could not go to Jerusalem personally to follow in Jesus' footsteps on Good Friday. We walk with Jesus (literally around the labyrinth) from his condemnation by Pilate, through His suffering and death, and finally to the tomb.

On Good Friday three years ago, I walked the Labyrinth for the first time. Not knowing many biblical details leading to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, I consider this a spiritual teaching. You walk in silence at your own pace, and at each of the 14 stations you pause and read the corresponding scriptural passage.

As I passed through each station, I wasn't prepared for the emotional impact this quest would have on my heart. Can you remember the times in your life when something almost brought you to your knees and you cried uncontrollably? Have you ever gone to a movie based on a true event and wanted to change the ending? By the time I stood at station 6 (Jesus is flogged and crowned with thorns) and 7 (Jesus carries His cross), I wanted to rewrite the script. My heart ached and my understanding of Jesus' journey deepened.

If you have an opportunity this year, walking this pilgrimage can be a faith- confirming experience.

Understanding His Journey—
“Day by Day”

Reminder: Our labyrinth will be set up in the Social Hall tomorrow from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

GOOD FRIDAY — MARCH 30

Rodney Gould

“Follow thee more nearly”

It seems like an easy one—following Christ more nearly. But only if you are prepared. Think of Peter, the chief of Christ's disciples, who denied even knowing Jesus. Peter made these denials in part because of weakness.

After the Last Supper, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus told his disciples to stay awake and pray while he went off to pray alone. Later, when he found them sleeping he warned Peter to stay awake and pray because, although his spirit might be willing, his flesh was weak. But Peter fell asleep again, and, by the time the soldiers had come to arrest Jesus, it was too late to pray for the strength to endure the ordeal to come. Peter's failure to pray must have occurred to him as he was weeping bitterly after his denials. But Peter learned his lesson about being prayerful, and he exhorts us in 1 Peter 5:8, “Be on the alert, because your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” If you want to follow Christ more nearly, pray—it is your only defense to being devoured by forces of evil who want to separate you from the Lord.

The allusion to the devil as a roaring lion is apt. Today's roaring lion that seeks to stop you from following Christ can be found all over the place: the television advertisement that encourages you to place material wealth before spiritual health; the drug pusher preying on vulnerable children; the internet website that encourages adulterous affairs—all these things, and so many more, are waiting to devour you and tear your heart from following Christ; but you have a secret weapon: prayer. Use it.

SATURDAY, MARCH 31

Rev. Louise Sloan Goben, Associate Pastor

**“Beyond Reasonable Doubt
JESUS IS ALIVE!”**

This is a billboard sign that I have seen in my driving in the community. As we approach Easter, it seems an especially pertinent slogan for what we are preparing for during the Lenten season.

One of my favorite spiritual writers is Richard Rohr, a Catholic priest and teacher. About resurrection he writes, “The Resurrection is not a one-time miracle that proved Jesus was God. Jesus’ death and resurrection *name and reveal what is happening everywhere and all the time* in God and in everything God creates. Reality is always moving toward resurrection. As prayers of the Catholic funeral Mass affirm, ‘Life is not ended but merely changed.’”

I remember when our children were very young and Galen and I would talk to them about the meaning of Easter. One of them commented, “Oh, I know what Easter is. It is when God made Jesus come back to life.” Bingo! He got it on the first try! We sometimes think that resurrection is something Jesus did because he was the divine son of God. The nature of resurrection is not that Jesus did it, but that God is the one that transforms us, changes us! It is what occurs in us, when we choose to receive God’s invitation to love and life.

God can take the very thing that seems like it may destroy us (the tragic, the sorrowful, and the painful) and transform it into that which draws us into hope and joy and healing.

Jesus is indeed saving the world by guiding us through all would-be deaths to a life that is always bigger than death (Richard Rohr).

Reminder: Five English-speaking services tomorrow at 6:00 am, 9:00 am, 11:00 am, and 7:00 pm; and one Spanish-speaking service at 1:00 pm.



If you want to fast for Lent...

Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.



Robert M. Bock, Senior Pastor

Each step throughout the long journey brought Jesus one step closer to His final triumph. But before that last victorious shout, the Prince of Peace walked through the gates of hell. Betrayal, arrest, flogging, false-accusations, a mock trial, desertion, humiliation, and finally crucifixion between two thieves were only part of the white-hot coals through which he walked.

When it was all over, those responsible for this travesty of justice thought they had won. Jesus the trouble maker, Jesus the heretic, Jesus the enemy of the religious establishment was laid in a cold, hard tomb, never to be heard from again.

But what they learned was that God simply operates day by day. On day one, God's love overcame the world's hatred, although the world did not yet know it.

On day two, God's justice overshadowed the world's injustice, as God prepared for the miracle of all miracles, although the world did not yet know it.

And on day three, God's power demonstrated the ultimate control God held, even through the worst of days and events. That power breathed new life into Jesus' dead body and a new era in history was born as He walked out of the tomb, very much alive.

Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?

God's timing is always perfect, day by day by day by day! God's timing is never wrong. And we might consider—if God, who can do anything with the snap of a finger, works miracles day by day, why wouldn't we want to do the same? Why wouldn't we want to grow ... day by day?

*Day by day, day by day,
O, dear Lord, three things I pray:
To see thee more clearly,
Love thee more dearly,
Follow thee more nearly,
Day by day, by day, by day, by day.*

When each and every day has been lived and each and every step has been taken, may we honestly say we see more clearly, love more dearly, and follow more nearly.

If so, then we may be able to grasp the depth of God's gift of the resurrection.

Happy Easter.

Pastor Bob

Christ
is
Risen!



4390 Colfax Avenue • Studio City, CA 91604

Tel: 818-763-8218 Fax: 818-763-8457 Web: www.fccnh.org

Robert M. Bock, Senior Pastor

Louise Sloan Goben, Associate Pastor

Jeremy Gillett, Director of Youth Ministries

Jennifer Le'au, Interim Director of Children's Ministries

Alfredo Gomez & Loydi Rivas Gomez, Spanish Speaking Congregation Pastors

Young Lan Kim & Young Jun Yang, Korean Pastors