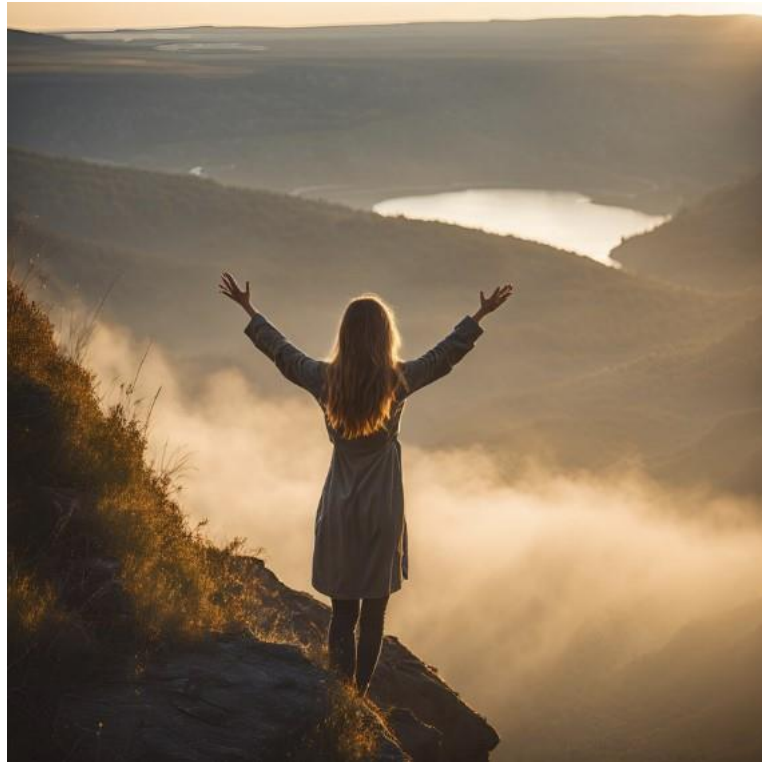




Payson Park Congregational Church
United Church of Christ

Lent Home Devotions 2025

40 Reflections for the 40 Days of Lent



“Do Not Be Afraid”

*"Have I not commanded you?
Be strong and courageous.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,
for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."
Joshua 1:9*

**Written by the people of Payson Park Church Community
With drawings from our youth & children.**

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Ways you may use our Lent Home Devotions

On your own

At a special time of the day, light a candle, pour a hot mug of a delicious brew, curl up on your favorite spot and read it.

Or make it a family affair

At a special time of the day, perhaps after the evening meal, have family members take turns with

Lighting a candle

Reading a devotion

Talking about your reactions or own reflections

Say the prayer at the end of the reflection

Shortly after I arrived at Payson Park Church, I began our practice of inviting the people of our church to write these Lent Home Devotions. I asked you to share your personal reflections of faith, lifting up God's scripture for our lives today, during the 40 days of Lent.

Years later, I am still in awe of the tender and powerful ways the people of God at Payson Park Church are sharing their faith through these short devotions in our Lent Home Devos. You amaze me, you comfort me, you challenge me, you strengthen my faith. Through you, God gives me hope. Thank you, once again, for sharing your words of reflection and hope.

Peace,

Pastor Eric

Day 1 Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2025

*[D]o not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.
Isaiah 41:10*

We begin the Lenten season with the simple phrase, “Do not fear.”

Devotion by Josh Lunde-Whitler, YCOM,
Youth & Community Outreach Minister

Easier said than done!

Fear is a staple of modern life: Will we have enough? Is my family safe? Can our children or grandchildren afford college? What is happening to our country? What legacy will we leave behind? These and other questions never seem too far away, and regularly impact our decision-making.

God through the prophet here in Isaiah implores Israel to not fear, even though they are in exile, and their nation has been destroyed. Why not fear? Because “I am your God.” Long ago God chose and claimed the people, and that promise will not be forgotten, even if the people’s inability to keep their promises to God and each other led to their own destruction.

We’ll pick this passage up again on Day 19. For now, how does God’s promise strike you right now—that God is “our God,” and is with us, even when fears and doubts crowd our minds and hearts? Does it lessen the force of those fears at all? Or, perhaps the questions remain, but the fact that God remains present, and does not abandon us even in the unknown darkness, is itself a comfort?

As we begin the Lenten season, take stock of the fears and worries you’re walking through. Might there be one to focus on during the season? What might God be asking you to do in response to that fear? How might this fear be re-imagined as a source of faith and hope?

Prayer: God, strengthen and help me with my fear of _____. Help me to remember you and your promises, even when walking through the darkness. Amen.

Day 2

Thursday, March 6, 2025

“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid,
but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”

2 Timothy 1:7

Devotion by Madeline Cronin

These days, with the news, I have felt a fear of the future and an uncertainty about our world. When I read this verse, it reminds me that we do have power over fear. We can look to our loved ones for support and also provide love and care for those around us who are in fear. This gives us collective strength instead of feeling paralyzed by fear. Rather than succumb to fear and the daily barrage of bad news, we must have self-discipline and be bold to choose what we can do to take actions to help others.

Prayer: God of courage and love, give us your strength and power over fear, to provide love and care for those around us, even in uncertain times. Amen.

Day 3

Friday, March 7, 2025

*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear;
for fear has to do with punishment,
and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love*

1 John 4:18

Devotion by Rev Bill Ragan, Associate Minister

What is the opposite of love? Most people would say hate, but here in the Bible, the opposite of love is fear. Fear of loss, suffering, and death at the hands of others causes hatred toward them. What if we truly believed in the power of God to give us new life in the resurrection and had no fear of the calamities of this life?

Prayer: God of perfect love, cast out the fear within us so that we can love you and all of your creation. Amen.

Day 4

Saturday, March 8, 2025

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."*

Psalm 91:1-2



Eva (age 8) felt brave after she dived for the first time.

Day 5

Monday, March 10, 2025

*I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.*

Psalm 34:4

Devotion by Rev Bill Ragan, Associate Minister

Has God ever answered you? I used to think that people who heard God speak to them should have their heads examined – rational, enlightened people believe that is a sign of mental instability. And yet, throughout our scripture, including here in this verse, we have clear examples of God answering someone.

A little over ten years ago, I started hearing God answer me – nothing dramatic but seemingly real, nonetheless. My spiritual director taught me to find every opportunity to say “Thank you” to God, and then he told me to wait and listen for God’s response. After years of practice, I say “Thank you” to God much more often and I hear God answer, “You’re welcome, Bill.” I say, “I need your help,” and hear “we’ll do this together,” and so on.

The only deliverance I have ever had from my fears has come from this personal, familiar, relationship with God. You may say I’m crazy, but my life was much worse – fear filled, in fact- when I would not seek God and listen for their answer.

You are already seeking God. Right here. Right now. Say what is on your heart, ask for what you need, and then listen. Can you hear God answering you?

Prayer: Thank you, God.

You’re welcome.

Help me, God.

Of course. We’ll do this together. I’ve got your back.

Day 6

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

"Have I not commanded you?
Be strong and courageous.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,
for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."
Joshua 1:9

Devotion by Chip Gaysunas

In times of loss and uncertainty, we may experience fear and doubt. At these times it's important to remember we are not alone and each of us has unique gifts and experiences to share. Don't be afraid, let your light shine through!

Prayer: Dear God, in uncertain times, remind us always we are not alone, and that you have given us gifts to share with those around us. Amen.

Day 7

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

*"The fear of man lays a snare,
but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe."
*Proverbs 29:25**

Devotion by Melissa Mitchell

Fear is a biggie. It can hang over us like an oppressive heavy cloud. We can be so overwrought that we make decisions that aren't in our best interest, nor the best interests of others. However, trusting in God can help keep us from being swayed by the opinions of others. That trust will protect us- if we believe and let it.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for protecting us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen

Day 8

Thursday, March 13, 2025

*Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, t
hey comfort me – ESV
Psalms 23:4*

Devotion by Florence Kwok

This verse of scripture became very personal and real to me as I walked through the darkest valley of a major surgery of my life. It had carried me through because I knew God was with me, even though I was alone, except with my medical care team, in the operation room. It had sustained me because God's rod and staff had protected and comforted me during my operation and my subsequent recovery. Even though I had experienced anxieties during that time due to my lack of faith, Jesus did not leave me alone in my fear. He still held my hand and walked with me patiently. I had passed from the valley of death to life, and from darkness to light because of Jesus my Shepherd. To-date, I have the assurance that God is always with me, to guide, provide and protect even in the darkest of times. Trust and believe, our omnipotent and omnipresent God is sufficient, there is no need to fear.

Prayer: Dear LORD Jesus, you are my Shepherd. I lack nothing. Thank you for your love, guidance, provision, and protection. Draw me close to you. Help me to hear your voice and follow you closely. Amen.

Day 9

Friday March 14, 2025

*Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you."
Isaiah 35:4*

Devotion by Rev Bill Ragan, Associate Minister

I am afraid for all the government workers who are losing their jobs. I am afraid for all those people around the world that our country used to support and now have had the rug pulled out from under them. I am afraid for the people who are LGBTQ+ and those whom much of society seeks to denigrate and exclude. I am afraid for the poor. I am afraid of the rich and powerful getting more rich and powerful with more and more disregard for the law.

When I feel all this fear welling up inside me, I want to wreak vengeance; I want exact recompense. And that would destroy me. That would destroy us. Our strength is not in acts of violence, but in trusting that God will show us the way to enact justice and save us from ourselves. I do not trust myself to wreak vengeance or exact recompense, but I pray that I trust in God to do so in wondrous ways through me and you and all those who love God and God's creation.

*Prayer: O God, give us the strength of your love, which casts out all fear.
Help us trust in you, and follow in the ways of your justice not ours. Amen.*

Day 10

Saturday March 15, 2025

*Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.
Psalm 27:3*

Devotion by Rachel Steely

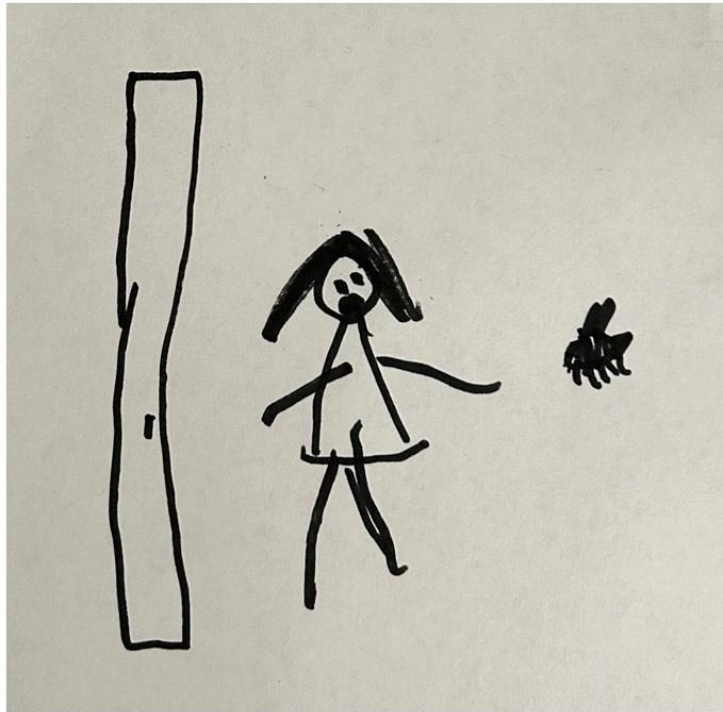
It's been a difficult winter, and I checked in with my sister to see how she was doing. She sent me a picture of her cat, and said, "A year ago I wasn't sure if he would still be with us, and now I've had a year more with him than I thought I would. Right now I'm looking at the positive things in life." We often measure God's kindness in terms of things we have, or opportunities we're given, instead of simply holding it close to us, and holding other close as well.

Lord, we thank you for the kindness you show to us, before we know it's there and when we don't appreciate it. And in the moments when we are closest to you, thank you for sharing your generous spirit. Amen.

Day 11

Monday March 17, 2025

*I sought the Lord, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
Psalm 34:4*



Mira (age 7) felt afraid after being stung by a wasp in her room! But Mom gave her gauze and helped her feel better.

Day 12

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*
Psalm 46:1-3

Devotion by Pastor Eric

I love the powerful imagery of this Psalm. Even during earthquakes, the ground shifting under our feet shifts, mountains collapsing in the middle of the ocean, tsunamis crashing on the land with roaring foam, God is our refuge and strength. We have all experienced earthquakes; a good friend moves away, a divorce rips through the extended family, a beloved partner dies, partisan politics attack what we had believed to be secure.

God is my refuge and strength when my friend Bob calls me at random times during the day, knowing that I am in the middle of a struggle, and listens to me. Bob sometimes ends his calls by saying, "Well Eric, have you really put it in God's hands? Have you asked for God's help?"

Prayer: Dear God, give me the strength to trust you today, and ask for your help, even in the middle of life's earthquakes. Amen

Day 13

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

*“Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow,
for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.
Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”
Matthew 6:34*

Devotion by Kathy Johansen

This passage means a lot to me because I know so many people who live in constant fear about the future and therefore cannot move forward peacefully in life. I try to remember these words when faced with concerning news. Life throws surprises at us and I have always said being full of fear does nothing to help a situation; that we must have faith in God and His Plan and let go, trusting in Him.

Prayer: Dear God, remind us to hold on to your amazing promises that we do not have to be anxious about tomorrow, because we can trust in you and your plan for us. Amen

Day 14

Thursday, March 20, 2025

*“When you pass through waters I will be with you,
and when you pass through rivers
they will not sweep over you.”*

Isaiah 43:2

Devotion by Emily Dallman

I believe that God sends us messengers. One of the times I was admitted to the hospital unexpectedly I was discouraged and wished that I weren't there. I was tired of not feeling well. The nurse assigned to me for the day came into the room and I was flabbergasted. She was wearing a scrub top with images of Betty Boop on it. My mother died in 2020 and her nickname was Betty Boop. I knew she was with me. I imagined her telling me “Aw Emmerdems (her nickname for me) , where else did you think I would be?” I was not alone as I passed through these turbulent waters. I have not seen such a scrub top before or since. We are never alone when we have Jesus and his messengers walking with us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending us messengers, letting us know we are not alone, that you are with us even when we pass through turbulent waters. Amen

Day 15

Friday, March 21, 2025

*When I thought, "My foot is slipping,"
your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.
When the cares of my heart are many,
your consolations cheer my soul.
Psalm 94:18-19*



By Bridget (age 4)

Day 16

Saturday March 22, 2025

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation
will be able to separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8:38-39*

Devotion by Pastor Eric

These words of scriptures, often read at funerals, are among the words I treasure the most. In my position, I deal with death on a regular basis, particularly the death of beloved members in our church, families that are grieving. In our world, we also deal with the power of death; from forces that deny food to the homeless, healthcare to the poor, and more. Personally, I have undergone various emergency surgeries to save my life, and have been revived multiple times from anaphylaxis shutting down my body's ability to breathe.

But even the powers of death cannot shut down the power of Love. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Prayer: Dear God, even when the powers of death are around us, give us the strength and courage to trust in your far more powerful love. Amen.

Day 17

Monday, March 24, 2025

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation
Whom shall, I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life
Of whom shall I be afraid?”
Psalm 27:1*

Devotion by Lorraine Clifford

There are times when I might need to do something or say something about a situation that I don't really want to deal with at the moment.

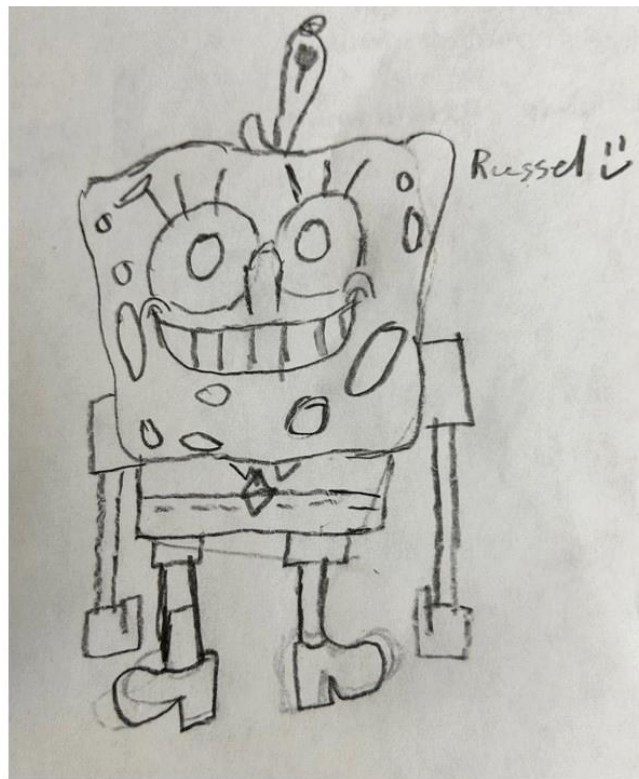
My mom always told me there is right and wrong. Do the right thing. All my life I've known that and I've tried to tell my children that while they were growing up. The more I think about something the more worried or stressed I might be. My Faith in God made me who I am. I can worry about something, but I've learned that it does not change the situation. Making the right choice is best.

Prayer: Dear Lord, be with me in all the days of my life. May I make the right choice, and do the right thing in all I say and do. Dear Lord, this I pray. Amen

Day 18

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.
1 Peter 5:7*



Russel (age 13) feels safe while watching Spongebob!

Day 19

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

*“For I, the LORD your God,
hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, ‘Do not fear,
I will help you.’
Isaiah 41:13*

Devotion by Josh Lunde-Whitler, YCOM

We return to the passage from Day One, with Israel in exile, and the prophet’s exhortation of “do not fear.” If you go back to read the whole passage (and elsewhere in Isaiah), you will get a sense of the depths of Israel’s misery, and why it would be so easy to fall into despair. The chosen people, conquered? If the holy nation of the Unspeakable Name, the one true God, could not survive, then what hope does anyone have? And yet as we saw on Day One, God was still with them after this tragedy.

This portion of the passage (v.13) repeats “I...” We might imagine the nation of Israel sitting shiva (in mourning), on the floor, at their lowest point... and God right there with her, arms around her... saying, “Hey, it’s me. You know me. I’m not going anywhere.” Perhaps we can imagine similar times in our lives—when we’ve been the one turning into a puddle, yet being held by God (through prayer, or through the embodied love of another). There might also be times when you’ve been the Holder, the one embodying to another the presence of divine Love that never lets us go.

One of the hard truths about a life of faith is that pain, suffering, and loss cannot be avoided. Despite what Marx and many others might say, religion isn’t an opiate – or at least, it shouldn’t be. In fact, it is precisely at our lowest points, our times of mourning, our Gethsemanes, our “cross moments,” when we face our faith most head-on. Instead of avoiding the pain, it is precisely when we face it, when we can find God sitting right there with us. And God might not take away our fear or suffering, but by holding us as we move through it, we can find meaning in it.

What was the fear that you considered, back on Day 1? Do you remember? Now that we’re almost half-way through Lent, has God taught you anything more about this fear? And/or, is there anything new that you want to commit to prayer, reflection, or study, as we move into the second half?

Prayer: God, thank you for sitting with us, when we are vulnerable, or at our lowest. Help remind us of your presence with us, and show us what you want us to grow. Amen

Day 20

Thursday, March 27, 2025

*With the Lord on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?
Psalm 118:6*

Devotion by Hilandia Neuta-Rendon

Speaks to our troubling times. We watch and listen to jaw-dropping news of incredible adversity that impacts the immigrant population and others. I witness and listen to their pain of spiritual brokenness, silencing their voices and creating fear. Hope and faith must be our guiding light during these dark times. But we must stand together for tolerance and mutual understanding among ALL people. We must continue our prayers and speak up for folks, who have no power or voice through advocacy to our state representatives and congress. We must continue to support organizations that serve those most affected by these uncertain times. Together we stand tall and overcome fear.

Prayer: Trust in the Lord. That His love endures during these challenging times. Even when we are afraid. May we be courageous, seekers of justice and compassionate to the least of our brothers and sisters. Amen

Day 21
& Day 22

Friday, March 28, 2025
Saturday, March 29, 2025

*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.
In God, whose word I praise- in God I trust and am not afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?
Psalm 56: 3-4*

Devotion by Gretchen Dunoyer

Life at times feels like a constant remembering of surrender and trust. And although I nourish my soul daily through meditation and communing with God, my faith is sometimes rocked to its core on the hardest days of untenable pain and symptoms. Yet I try to remember to surrender, surrendering to God's will, knowing that whatever is taking me down in that moment is not as strong as God's faithfulness and love. Surrender then flows into trust, allowing for a gentle exhale, and returning my body and mind and spirit to homeostasis. None of us are immune to life's waves of challenges. Yet the more we practice surrender and trust, the greater God's light can penetrate our deepest wounds, allowing for more love to come pouring through us, pouring into our world, and lighting up the darkest of spaces.

*Prayer Dear God,
Cover us with your grace and protection. Hover tenderly over us as we move about this broken world, praying for peace and light to make its way into every corner of our precious earth. Amen*

Day 23
& Day 24

Monday, March 31, 2025
Tuesday, April 1, 2025

"What then are we to say about these things?

If God is for us, who is against us?

Romans 8:31

Be Not Afraid, as fear can lead to despair and inaction.

Devotion by Mary Alice Wistman

Although it is hard to be optimistic in these difficult times, I believe God calls us to be hopeful. We can be hopeful as we resist evil by taking action for justice. Fear is conquered by hope, and the love of God, and the love that the people of this community find in each other. Let us be thankful for the Grace of God that gives us strength to carry on through difficult times.

Prayer: Dear God, we give thanks you call us to be hopeful in these difficult times, and you give us the grace to take your action for justice. Amen

Day 25
& Day 26

Wednesday, April 2, 2025
Thursday, April 3, 2025

*“Keep your lives free from the love of money,
and be content with what you have; for he has said,
‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’
So we can say with confidence,
‘The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.
What can anyone do to me?’
Hebrews 13:5-6*

Devotion by Josh Lunde-Whitler, YCOM

This whole passage is about what it looks like to live in mutuality (v.1), a hallmark of early Christian communities and a very radical idea to those living in the highly stratified and class-obsessed Roman Empire. Verse 5 makes clear that our commitment to financial generosity is an inescapable part of living for the common good of all. Read in this way, “being content” involves not only our attitudes towards our money and possessions, but also how we respond and change as a result of this attitude-adjustment.

Many generous people are reading this devotional right now, as generosity has been a hallmark of this community, Payson Park Church, for some time.

What might it mean to you, to consider your generosity as an expression of your faith – or more to the point, a way of declaring “God is my helper, I will not fear; what can anyone do to me?!”

Are there fears we can let go of, or loosen our grips on, so that our hearts and minds become more open, more generous?

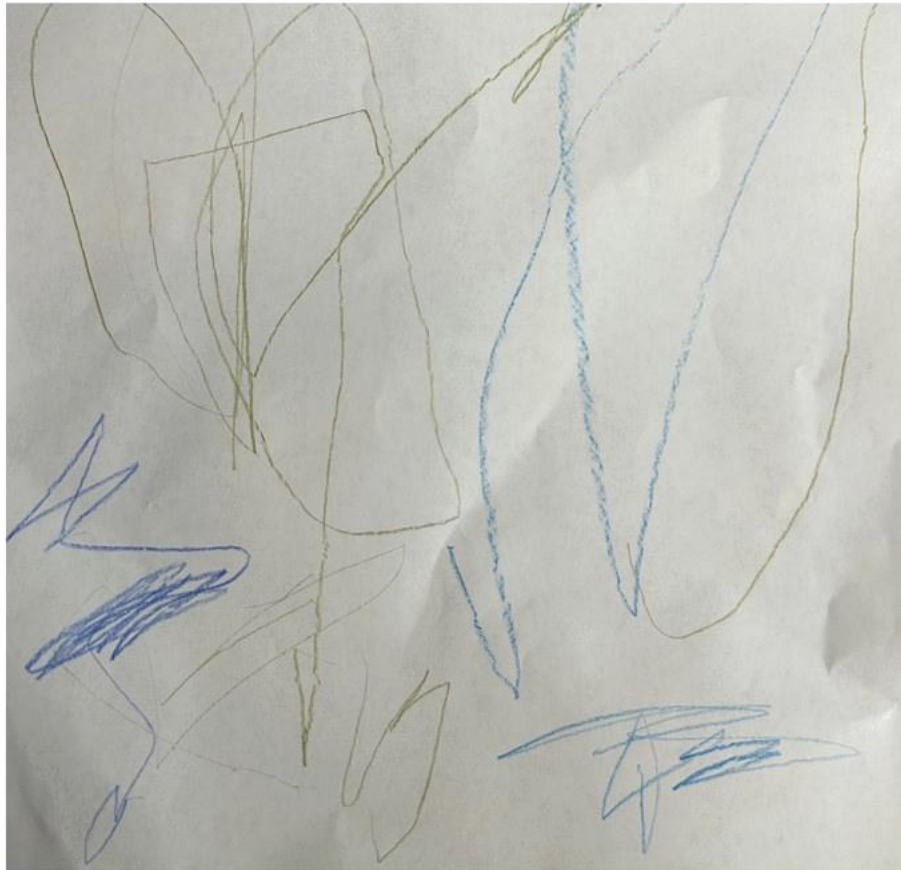
Or maybe the reverse can be true... Can we recall and contemplate our acts of generosity, as expressions of God’s love, so that they remind us what truly matters, what is truly beautiful, and help us let go of our fears?

Prayer: God, help us to find contentment in you, so that your love for the world shines through us. Amen.

Day 27
& Day 28

Friday, April 4, 2025
Saturday, April 5, 2025

*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*



By Nathan (age toddler)

Day 29
& Day 30

Monday, April 7, 2025
Tuesday, April 8, 2025

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, & the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, & yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”

Matthew 6:25-26

Devotion by Grace Yuen

I have always found deep joy and comfort in caring for my cats. They are more than just pets; they are family, companions, and a source of peace in my life. Every day, I make sure they are fed, comfortable, and safe. I know their quirks (they love chewing plastic), their favorite resting spots (usually some place soft and warm), and the little things that bring them happiness (like chasing a moth around the house). They don't worry about their next meal or whether they are loved—they simply rest in the care I provide for them. In Matthew 6:25-26, Jesus reminds us that if God cares for the birds of the air, providing for their every need, how much more will He care for us? Just as my cats don't have to earn my love or provision, I don't have to strive to earn God's care—it is already there, constant and unwavering. And yet, each day, I question whether I am enough. I worry that I am underperforming in life. I wonder if I am disappointing others or if I am seen the way I long to be. Sometimes I compare myself to my peers and feel like I'm underachieving, that I need to push myself more, and that I've fallen behind in everything I set for myself. But just as my cats are secure in my love when they're sleeping in my lap, God invites me to trust in His care, to rest in the knowledge that He sees me, values me, and will provide what I need. this Lent, I am reminded to let go of fear and control, to embrace the truth that I am deeply loved and cared for by a God who sees every detail of my life and loves me all the same. Just as I provide for my beloved cats without them having to ask, God does the same for me. All I have to do is to trust Him.

Reflection:

- What worries am I holding onto that I need to release to God?
- How can I rest in the knowledge that I am fully cared for by Him?
- In what ways have I seen God's provision and love in my life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me so deeply and providing for my every need. Help me to release my fears and trust in Your care, just as the birds of the air do. Remind me that I don't have to earn Your love—it is freely given. Teach me to rest in Your presence and believe that I am enough in Your eyes. Amen.

Day 31

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

*But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not be afraid;
you are of more value than many sparrows.*

Luke 12:7



Quinn (age 2) drawing how brave she is learning to be on the balance beam.

Day 32

Thursday, April 10, 2025

*And waking up, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Be silent! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another,
"Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*
Mark 4:39-41

Devotion by Pastor Eric

These words from the Good News of Mark come from the adventure of the disciples. They are crossing from home territory, Jewish land, where Jesus has shared his teachings and healings and feed the multitudes. The disciples are crossing the sea over to foreign land, where people worship different gods. There Jesus will also share his teachings and healings, and he will again feed the multitudes. What Jesus is doing is quite scary to them, for he is treating the other, the foreigner, sometimes the enemy, with the same love he gave to God's faithful people.

Who is "the other" for you? Who is "very unlike" you?

Today we are still often fearful of sharing with people who are not like us. Through Jesus, God helps all of us disciples to cross over our fears, and bring God's love even to those outside of our narrow tribes.

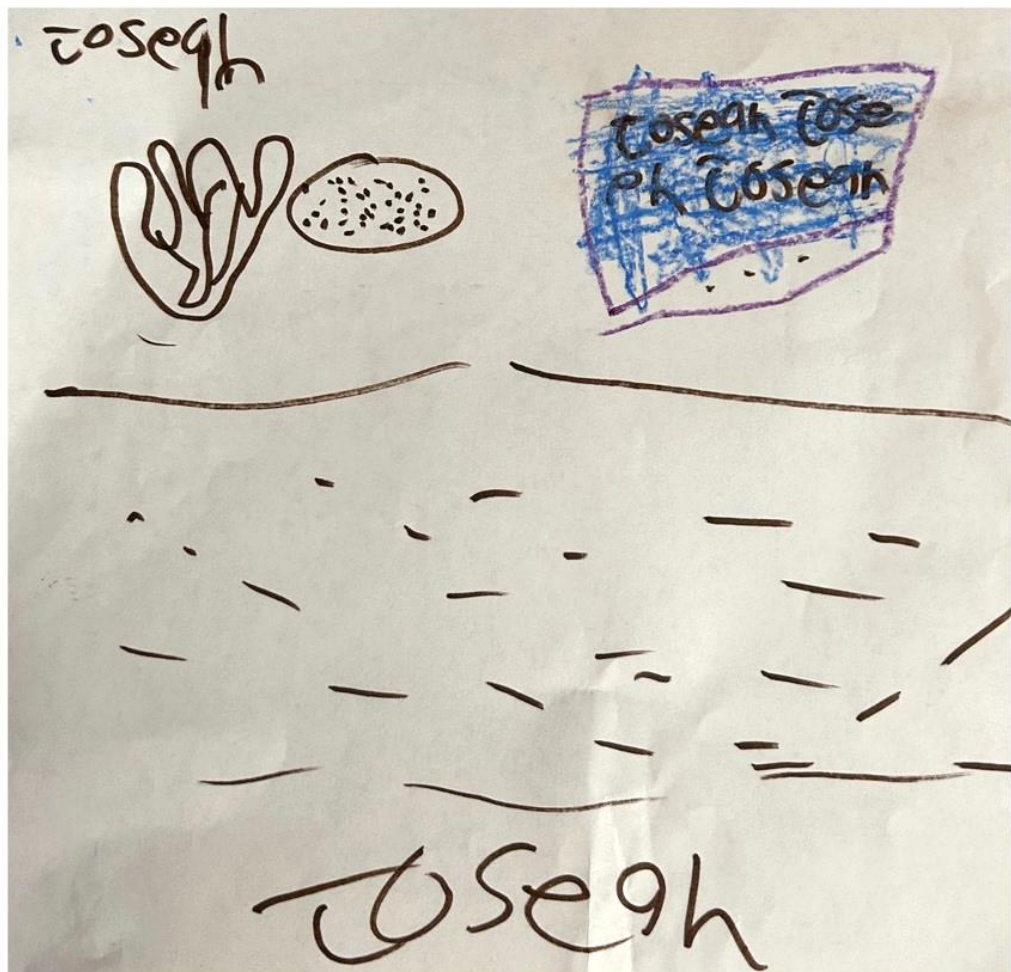
Prayer: Dear God, thank you for calming the waves and winds of our fears, as we accept your mission to cross over to the other, in the name of Love and Caring. Amen.

Day 33
& Day 34

Friday, April 11, 2025
Saturday, April 12, 2025

But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded.

Mark 6:49-51



Joseph (age 6) feels calmer after eating snacks (left) and snuggling in his blanket (right)

Day 35
& Day 36

Monday, April 14, 2025
Tuesday, April 15, 2025

*[A]nd so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee,
who were partners with Simon.*

*Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid;
from now on you will be catching people.'*

Luke 5:10

Devotion by Josh Lunde-Whitler, YCOM

This group of three (in the author of Luke's telling of the story), despite probably being quite young by today's standards, were nevertheless expert fishers. Fishing was what they knew best. Their well-earned wisdom had told them to call it a night; there was nothing to catch today. But then, here comes a controversial, itinerant rabbi, telling them how to do their job! How might you feel if you were them?

Peter's response is one of deference – Rabbis (teachers) were given respect in their culture, even controversial ones. But we would not be shocked if Peter and Co. were dubious, or if especially the sons of Zebedee were a little resentful of Peter's willingness to play along. Perhaps this explains Peter's reaction in v.8; "Go away from me, for I am sinful!" – as an expression of guilt, for not truly believing that anything would come from one more casting of the nets.

It's impossible to say for certain. But from this interpretation, "Do not be afraid" becomes a form of assurance, not only that God would not judge them, but that God can actually use faith that is incomplete, reluctant, and/or full of doubts, to fulfill an even higher purpose than they could ever foresee before now (i.e., to "catch people," to invite others into transformative community). Do you sometimes fear if your faith is "enough"? If it's too full of doubts, or anxieties, or misunderstandings, to mean much? If so, consider Peter! Throughout his journey of faith, Peter missteps, falters, and even runs away; yet he becomes a foundational figure in the church. But even at this initial moment of his discipleship, Jesus is showing Peter that all steps of faith, no matter how small or seemingly-paltry, can make a difference.

Prayer: God, help me to let go of the fear of not measuring up, and instead guide me to keep seeking, asking, "What small step of faith can I take next"? Then please help me to take it. Amen.

Day 37
& Day 38

Wednesday, April 16, 2025
Thursday, April 17, 2025

The Apostle Paul's Letter to the Philippians
prescribes an antidote for our constant worrying:

*“Do not worry about anything, but in everything
by prayer and supplication
with thanksgiving let your requests
be made known to God.”
Philippians 4:6*

Devotion by Linda Knight

During these post-pandemic years, times of government chaos, tech-obsession, and "existential loneliness," we all worry. We worry about our nation, we worry about our loved ones, we worry about our health, we worry about our job security, we worry about our credit card debt, rising food and housing costs, and we worry about completing all our tasks in overcrowded schedules. We worry during the day and stay awake at night, ruminating about all the worst-case scenarios that might occur in the future.

*Prayer: Dearest Lord, We are giving all our fears to **YOU**, thankful that **YOU** will transform them to trust in **YOUR** Eternal Care and Keeping.
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Day 39

Good Friday, April 18, 2025

*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.
But he placed his right hand on Me, saying,
'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one...'
Revelation 1:17 (-18a)*

Devotion by Tom Best

Remember: Revelation is written so you can understand it (yes, really). This text is about a positive fear – it's overpowering and awesome, so of course you are afraid. But it wants to take you beyond yourself, to make you better than you are. So push past your fear and ask: What does God want of me right now, fearful as I am? What can I do? Whom can I help?

Prayer:

Loving God, help us push past my fear and feel you beside me. Guide and sustain me as I become the person you created me to be. Amen

Day 40

Holy Saturday, April 19, 2025

*But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid,
for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.*

*He is not here, for he has risen,
as he said, see the place where he lay."*

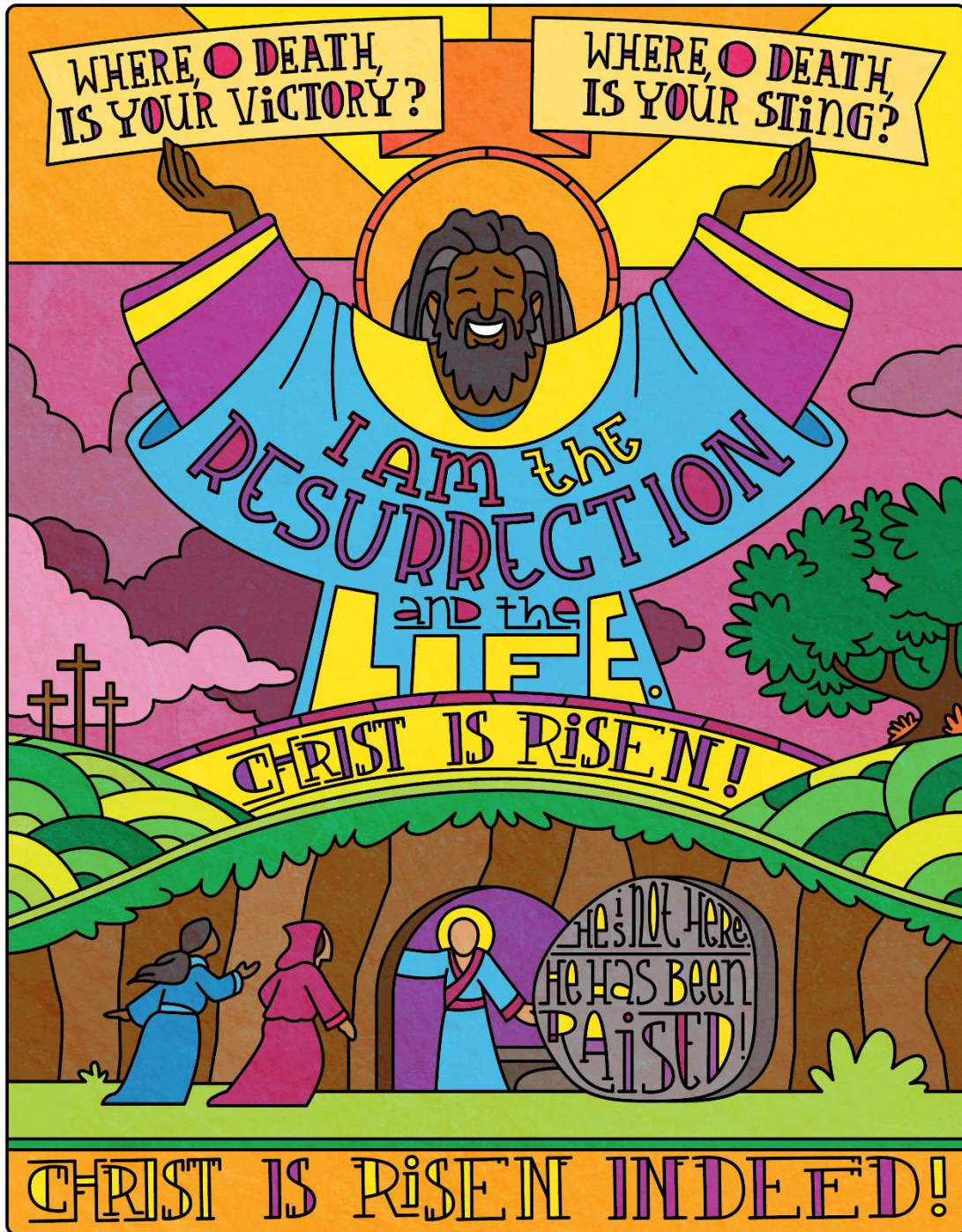
Matthew 28:5-6

Devotion by Emily Dallman

Can you imagine the courage these women had? I don't know if confronted by that situation I would have run away. What form did the angel take? Can you imagine being greeted by an angel and learning that Jesus had risen from the dead? In order to stay they must have been enveloped in love otherwise I would have thought it was too scary. It's easy to say be not afraid; it is altogether different to not be afraid.

Prayer I pray that when we have moments in our life when we are afraid, we feel God's love enveloping us.

April 20, Easter Sunday



John 20:1-18 • illustratedministry.com

Happy Easter, Alleluia!