

# From Ashes to Easter



## Lent: Return to Our God

Lutheran Church of the Reformation

Lent 2025

Cover Art by Vicki Shuck

# From Ashes to Easter

The Meditations of Our Hearts

By Members & Friends of this Community

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE REFORMATION

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## **Worship Times at Lutheran Church of the Reformation**

For details and links for the Worship services,  
visit: [www.ReformationDC.org/worship](http://www.ReformationDC.org/worship)

### **Ash Wednesday**

March 5th

Ashes to Go (Outside): 8am-12p.m.

Ash Wednesday Service - 7:00 p.m.

### **Holy Week Services**

Maundy Thursday, April 17th - 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, April 18th - 7:00 p.m.

### **Easter Morning**

April 20th - 8:30 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

*Easter Morning Brunch at 9:30am*

*We give thanks for all of the saints who have  
journeyed before us and all those who have crafted this  
annual devotion for 39 volumes.*

## FROM OUR COUNCIL PRESIDENT

Dear Reader,

I write to you for the first time as congregation president. Admittedly, I was not expecting to write to you from under a microscope. As Christians, and particularly, as Lutherans, we have been subjected to deplorable accusations and criticisms. We are attacked for our faith and for how we practice our faith. Make no mistake, there is danger in this world. And yet, Christ commands us to keep moving forward.

As we begin the forty-day journey towards Golgotha, we must remind ourselves of Jesus' words: Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Yes, the crowd will jeer, and the pain will increase. But with each step we move closer to that glorious cross.

I'm not a scholar, I don't have all the answers, but I do have this little book of forty inspiring and motivating reflections that has guided Reformation's pilgrimage for nearly forty years. I hope you'll read along with me.

Sincerely,

Evan Schrage  
Council and Congregation President  
Church of the Reformation (Lutheran)

## One Way to Use this Booklet:

**Opening:** Trace a small cross on your forehead to remind yourself of the ashes that you received,

*Today, let my heart be good soil,  
open to the seed of your word.*

**Scripture:** Find the Scripture passage for the appropriate day. You will find this located at the top right of each page. Some authors have also included a specific ‘focus verse’, as well, before their devotion.

**Reflection & Pray:** After reading the assigned Scripture passage, read the words from the author of the daily reflection. Pray with the author at the end.

**Closing:** Take a moment to reflect, breathe, and then go in peace.

March 5

Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

### **Performative Faith**

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Matthew 6:21

One of the most fascinating comments I've gotten over the last few years is "I didn't realize you were a Christian!" This is usually followed by "You seem so..." and I watch as the person tries not to say "normal" and I usually end up laughing and thanking them when they do decide on an adjective.

I think I get this response because people have come to expect a certain type of behavior from someone who claims to follow Christ. Often someone who is loud, who is braggadocious, who is exactly what Jesus warns against in this scripture passage. He warns against being a hypocrite, which in today's language, I would call performative. Don't go around bragging about how much you give, how often you pray, how long you've been fasting—just do the thing and continue about your life. Because ultimately, it doesn't matter what the people here think about what you've done. It matters what your heavenly parent thinks—and God knows all of our hearts.

Perform your acts of faith because they are the right thing to do, not so that others may see and know.

*Our holy parent in heaven,  
May your kingdom flourish on this earth,  
And may your will be done here as it is in heaven.  
Give us nourishment for today.  
Forgive our sins and,  
Give us the grace to forgive others.  
Protect us from harm as we go out into the world,  
So that our quiet witness may bring you glory.  
Amen.*

### The Cruelty is the Point

*You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw... Make the work harder for the people.*

Exodus 5:7-8

For background, this occurs before any of the plagues. Merely by Moses asking for time off so the Israelites can worship God, Pharaoh lashes out. Rather than showing even an iota of mercy, and beyond simply denying the request, the workload is made exponentially more difficult. Pharaoh has no desire to cede power. Better to inflict pain and quash any thoughts of rebellion. The cruelty is the point.

Upon experiencing this cruelty, Moses voices his frustrations to God. But even still, his faith and trust in God does not waiver. We too can voice our frustrations to God as well – God is always ready to listen. Yet, we too need to maintain our faith and trust in God. The Israelites did not know how it would work out. Moses could only foresee it getting worse.

Of course, we know the rest of the story. We know that God holds more power than any human – especially humans believing themselves to be a god in their own right.

And yet, when we see or experience misery inflicted in places where mercy is needed, we generally do not see how it will all work out. We often can only foresee things getting worse. In those cases, we need to hear this history and lean into comfort that God holds more power than any human – especially humans believing themselves to be a god in their own right.

*Dear God, thank you for always listening to us – even when we only come with our anger and frustrations. And remind us to trust in you and lean into your strength. Empower us to keep moving forward.*

March 7

Friday

Exodus 6:1-13

### **Am I Disposable?**

*I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement.... Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.*

Exodus 6:6-9

I hear “When do you plan to retire?” less frequently now. After more than five decades in civil service for the same agency (???), could colleagues believe I’ve done my time, earned a respite, or worn out my welcome? Long ago, I handled paper invoices, checks, documents. I inspected cargo shipments, passenger belongings. Today those international transactions occur electronically, screened with advanced technology.

Joseph was Pharaoh’s trusted adviser when Israelites arrived in Egypt. That was then; now they are at the bottom of Egypt’s social pyramid. They are a commodity in the community, labor for employment at will.

I relate to those whose despair overshadowed the Lord’s indestructible promise. Draconian executive orders are indiscriminately truncating careers and stifling public services. Where will deliverance come from? Through human efforts fueled by the declaration “I have remembered my covenant.” We are never alone.

Perhaps I am dispensable. I may not have a choice in when to retire from my current work. But “retire” from the covenant? As a faith cohort, we’ve only just begun....

*We shall not give up the fight, we have only started.*

(<https://www.riseupsinging.org/songs/we-shall-not-give-up-fight>)



March 8

Saturday

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

### **Everything Has Its Time**

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.*  
Ecclesiastes 3:1

In this reading we are reminded of two important aspects of our lives: nothing stays the same and what we go through in this life is allowed by God with great purpose and intentionality. The only thing certain in life is change and to fully appreciate what we have, we are to savor the day, the bountiful harvest, the highs of the seasons; for as surely as we experience joy, we will see the valleys, the lows, the difficult days, the failed crop, the hard times.

The mysteries of life are hard to grasp, but in returning to God, in the midst of the many seasons, we can emerge attuned to His direction and purpose for our lives. The author of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, teaches us that we can trust God will make things beautiful and cause our lives to be abundant in meaning.

As the gardener purposefully plants the seeds in the Spring, hoping they will germinate and bring forth fruitful plants in summer, in turn producing a Fall harvest with a bountiful feast to come, may we know the author of our lives is indeed planting and nurturing a deep and unshakeable faith.

*Lord, continue to guide us along the way and help us to see the beauty and the purpose that gives meaning to our lives. Amen.*

March 9

Sunday

Luke 4:1-13

### **Return to the Jordan**

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was ... tempted by the devil. Luke 4:1-2.*

When first approaching this scripture, the temptations presented to Jesus are somewhat puzzling. What is so wrong about turning stone to bread if one is starving (assuming one has such powers)? Would a carpenter's son really be tempted by all the kingdoms of the world? And who in their right mind would be enticed to throw themselves down from a great height? Perhaps the common thread is the challenge to Jesus' core identity. "IF you are the Son of God...", the devil goads. To carry his ministry from its beginning (in the Jordan) to its end (on the cross) necessitated that Jesus keep true to his identity as Son of God. Whereas the Israelites constantly lost sight of their inheritance as God's chosen people through 40 years in the wilderness, in his 40 days in the desert, the Messiah never veered from his identification as God's Son. Though famished, he did not trade his birthright for a bowl of stew, as did Esau. And unlike Adam, he heeded not the serpent's whisper, "Did God really say...?," when tempted by food pleasing to the eye. Jesus, unlike the rest of fallen humanity, constantly returned to the Father's blessing in the baptismal waters of the Jordan, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

*Father, bring to mind our baptismal calling as Your beloved children, especially when we find ourselves in deserted places, hungry places, places where we don't see or feel You near. We are so grateful that though we often falter in our faith, Jesus never wavered in his identity and purpose, through the wilderness and even death on the cross. May we return to You, again and always. Amen.*

**Finding a New Way**

*Rise up, O Lord, confront them, overthrow them!  
By your sword deliver my life from the wicked,  
from mortals—by your hand, O Lord—  
from mortals whose portion in life is in this world.  
May their bellies be filled with what you have stored up for them;  
may their children have more than enough;  
may they leave something over to their little ones.  
As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;  
when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.* Psalm 17:13-15

I immediately heard the voices of my friends and neighbors, whose federal or federally funded jobs have been eliminated, in David's prayer – the cry of a righteous man who has been wronged by the rich and powerful.

Or maybe it's the voices of the people they served: the vulnerable among us whose services have suddenly been cut, strangers in a foreign land who finally made it to safety only to find themselves living in fear again.

Many people feel a calling to their profession and may even feel that they are doing God's work on earth through their jobs. When those jobs are ripped away, what's left? God's work is still there to be done. How will we find a new way to do it?

With the coming of spring, with more warmth and light, and with the reminder of Christ's own seemingly impossible resurrection from the dead, I hope we will be able to regroup and refocus on what is truly important. As David wrote, while others seek to gain worldly things, we should look to God for our satisfaction.

*Merciful God, keep us focused on what we can do to further your kingdom here on earth. Keep us from despair, and instead inspire us. Strengthen your Reformation community and help us to support each other. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

March 11

Tuesday

2 Peter 2:4-21

### **False Prophets and Their Punishment**

*The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. 2 Peter 2:9b*

Let us pray,

*Father, in these verses, you have reminded me that the cross frees me from sin but does not free me to sin. I admit that I am a sinner. You know my struggles; you know my faults. Oh, how easy it would be for me to return to that which kept me from You. I know that the grace of Your Son alone will save me from the time of trial.*

*You are the way, the truth, and the life. Guard me against those who would lead me into temptation. Give me the strength to witness against those who corrupt Your word to justify their failures.*

*Your victory was assured when the stone rolled away. Yet there are still those who seek You among the mortals. Keep me in your loving arms, safe in the knowledge that my faith in You is all you require.*

*Amen.*

### Enduring Suffering with God's Wisdom

*There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. . . . While the messenger was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you." Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing. Job 1:1–2, 18–22.*

With everything that's happened these past several weeks in D.C., these familiar opening lines from the Book of Job really hit. Job steadfastly followed God's wisdom, and he prospered for a while, but when his prosperity immediately and arbitrarily turned to suffering, he didn't blame God or abandon God's wisdom.

Job's story reminds me that I don't follow God's wisdom because I hope that God will reward my fidelity with some favor or benefit; I follow God's wisdom because it is good advice for living. And I worship God because I am satisfied and grateful that following God has given me the capacity for hope and joy notwithstanding my circumstances.

If Job had abandoned God or turned from God's wisdom at the depth of his suffering, as the accuser expected him to do, he would only have deprived himself of God's wisdom and strength and companionship to help him endure his suffering. So much of God's word is about enduring suffering because suffering is so much a part of life. Even Jesus's life was defined as much by his ministry as by the relentless, inevitable suffering he endured at the cross. The lesson of Job and so much of the Bible is that we will suffer, even or especially those who closely follow God's wisdom, but our moments of suffering are also opportunities for intense comfort and closeness with God and with one another.

*Dear Lord, in life's inevitable moments of suffering, help me to worship you for the gift of your wisdom and to find opportunities for that suffering to create closeness with you and with others around me.*

March 13

Thursday

Genesis 13:1-7; 14-18

### **Trusting Our Futures to God**

*“The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, ‘Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.’”* Genesis 13:14

Abram was at a turning point. Pharaoh had just exiled him from Egypt, forcing him to move into an uncertain future. The group had problems, and it was clear that the land could not support them all. Abram offers Lot the choice about where to move. This choice will have important repercussions for Abram: will the land allotted to Abram be sufficient to support him and Sarai, the household and possessions? Will they be protected from potential threats and enemies? Will separating from Lot improve their chances to survive and thrive, or could they be weakened and put in danger – possibly even facing death? Abram puts his faith in God and lets Lot make a choice.

These verses show one outcome: God promises a future to Abram, with numerous subsequent generations and some measure of physical security. God’s promise here was enough for Abram, so he settled in an area and built an altar for worship and sacrifice. God had made him a promise, so Abram would live in that promise.

Any turning point in life where we face an uncertain future, with significant consequences stemming from one decision, can be fraught. Like Abram, we can’t foresee the future or predict perfectly how our decision will play out. The potential risks and dangers seem clear and extreme. We can be tempted toward “analysis paralysis.” Abram shows a better path, trusting in God to provide, no matter what. We can be sure that God’s promise – best reflected by Jesus’s resurrection – will endure for us.

*God, thank you for your many promises, especially your promise of eternal salvation through your son, Jesus. As I continue on my Lenten journey, remind me daily of that promise. Please strengthen my trust in you to provide for me, confident that you have planned and provided for my future, even when it seems so uncertain to me. In your name I pray, Amen.*

March 14

Friday

Philippians 3:17-20

### **Pressing Toward the Goal**

*“But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he asks that they imitate him, not to look to others who may be living in what is a wasteful, misogynistic, and ‘me-obsessed’ life, but to live their lives in a thoughtful, caring, God-focused life.

I imagine that Paul’s encouragement helps us remember that if we don’t have faith or clarity of vision, we could miss what is right in front of us. We could miss the hatred amidst the chaos, the ugliness, and the divisiveness. Having a God-focused life frees us from wondering how to choose our path. We are free to know that this distinct focus can only relieve us from all the chaos that could consume us.

Right now, the chaos is real. Many feel unheard, unjustly persecuted, and underserved by a faction that wants us to feel pressure to see ourselves differently. Fortunately for us, there is hope. Paul reminds us to follow his example and to look for Jesus’ return, learn from those who are not following the way, and keep in mind to, “...join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.”

It’s easy to be myopic and easy to ignore the small injustices. By contrast, the small injustices can amass into something that cannot be overcome. I have often thought about the analogy of the frog sitting in a pot of water, slowly boiling to death. This could materialize easily if we are not paying attention to what is happening around us. Our goal is to jump out of that pot. Be God-focused. Be heard and seen and know that if we don’t, we will not join Paul, even with tears, to find a way to know that what is currently happening in this world, earthly, hollow righteousness, and arrogance are fleeting.

Let us pray.

*Dear Lord,  
Give us the strength to stay God-focused. Help us to believe in your truth and your way. Show us the path to heaven through our earthly thoughts and acts, and to know your love by serving you every day.*

**Trust in time of Despair**

For the past 20 years when the plea went out to write a message for From Ashes to Easter I always ducked. I knew Al would welcome the chance to write a meditation. This year when Ivy reached out to me I hesitantly said “yes”.

At times our faith in God is strong and life seems to be going well.

***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?***

But at other times, such as when I write this, we see thousands of people, some of whom I know personally, are losing their jobs for unjust reasons. We see aid to millions of hungry people cut off abruptly while tons of good food are rotting in ships in the harbors. Then these words of the psalmist feel more fitting to me:

***Give me not up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me and they breathe out violence.***

I find hope at this troubled time and am thankful that I can worship and be refreshed each Sunday at Reformation where we can join in singing together, “All are welcome in this place.” he psalmist ends with:

***I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage.***

*Heavenly father, you are our hope; help us trust in you. Amen.*



March 16

Sunday

Luke 13:31-35

### **Go Tell That Fox**

*“Go tell that fox, I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day, I will reach my goal.”* Luke 13:32

Good Neighbors of Capitol Hill, our coalition of Capitol Hill congregational members and friends, had just finished furnishing our 149th home for a refugee family in an apartment complex in nearby Maryland. We were preparing to begin the first of three more apartments when we were told by the leasing office that not only could we not start those, but we might have to take down the one we had just completed! We learned from our beloved partner, Lutheran Social Services of the National Capitol Area, that this response came because of one false tweet from the Administration’s false prophets about this highly respected, 100+-year-old organization. With faith and determination, LSSNCA staff were able to turn around the apartment management so that we could continue at least the three setups. But we had to get all four families into their units immediately. That one lie, along with funding cuts and stop work orders, continues to hinder the work of LSSNCA and all their sister agencies—efforts that serve people in need and save lives across our region and the country every day.

In today’s reading from Luke, we find Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, fulfilling his *dei*—his divine purpose that includes his own death, of establishing God’s kingdom in this world. In Isaiah’s words, he names God’s call on him to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Luke 4:18)

I find the challenge of Scott Shauf, who commented on this passage in 2013, compelling for us today: “Can we make sense of our lives as part of the establishment of God’s kingdom in our world? Or are we frightened by the threats of earthly rulers?”

In verse 34, Jesus says: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”

*May we hear God’s call and be willing to act in the way of the cross. Amen*

March 17

Monday

Romans 4:1-12

### **Through Grace by Faith**

*Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*

Romans 4:3

I can feel Lutheran theology pouring through the scripture verse for today. Abraham, a leader that God chooses, was not chosen for his good works. He did not have to complete a checklist, or upload a resume, or prove himself through his deeds. Instead, God chose him because of his faith.

This immediately made me think of a term in Lutheran Theology called justification, which was one of the main teachings that drew me to the ELCA. Justification means that our salvation isn't dependent on our acts or deeds. There's not a theorem or math equation happening in the sky, like The Good Place, that ultimately determines whether I am good enough or not. Instead, it's through God's grace that I am saved by faith.

But does this mean we are off the hook from doing any good deeds or being active citizens? I don't think so. This is where the freedom theology of Martin Luther comes into play. Because of grace, we don't have to constantly be worrying about our own individual salvation. We don't have to be constantly doing the math in our heads. Because of this, we are then freed to go out into the world and be active participants in our communities. Justification allows us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

That's the invitation I am feeling from this passage in my own Lenten journey. God has chosen each of us. How does that choice give us strength to go out and face the day?

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me. Through grace, may we be freed to do God's work of justice in the world. Amen.*

(A prayer adapted from St. Patrick's breastplate prayer)

March 18

Tuesday

Numbers 14:10-24

### **The Hope of Caleb**

*But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me wholeheartedly, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it. Numbers 14:24*

I've been thinking a lot about the meaning of hope recently. What does it mean to have hope when everything around you seems to be falling apart and you only see more darkness ahead.

This passage was the perfect tool for that, both its message and the structure of the passage itself. On first reading I struggled to find encouragement in the passage. It starts with Caleb under threat of stoning for asking the people to trust that he would protect them and that they should enter the land of Canaan as God instructed.

The people didn't want to hear any of it from Caleb. They had fled Egypt, were wandering in the wilderness and the Canaanites looked exceedingly strong. Most of the rest of the passage was just as disheartening. God wanted to wipe the Israelites off the map for disobeying them and was only dissuaded once Moses convinced him God would look weak if his people perished. God relented, but cursed the current generations of the Israelites, saying none of them would enter the promised land because of their lack of faith. They would have to wait forty years until their children's generation could enter.

All except Caleb. The passage started with Caleb at risk for trusting in God and speaking truth. It ends with God rewarding Caleb's faith by allowing him to enter the promised land. When times seem tough, be a Caleb and have hope that God will carry you through.

*Lord, grant us hope like Caleb's, trusting that you will carry us through trials that seem insurmountable to provide us blessings beyond all measure. Amen.*

**Hold the Line**

*Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wonderful works.  
Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice...  
Remember the wonderful works he has done,  
His miracles, and the judgements he uttered.*  
Psalm 105:2-3, 5

Psalm 105 asks us to praise God, for all the good things that he's done in the past. It recounts God's promise to Abraham, his faithfulness to Isaac, and his covenant with Jacob. It reminds us of how he sent Joseph into Egypt ahead of the famine, and then sent Moses to bring his people out of slavery.

What if we're not the generation that experiences the good times? This Psalm recounts God's wonderful works and his miracles in the times of the patriarchs— but what about those generations of Israelites that lived in bondage in Egypt, just waiting? What are we supposed to do while we wait?

Right now I'm writing from the middle of a lot of uncertainty— as a federal worker and as someone who lives in D.C. I don't know how I'll feel a month from now, when it's time to read this again. I hope that we have some stability— that we will have our jobs and home rule and a functioning constitution. But I just don't know.

I do know that I trust God, and I trust all of you. I know that we'll be supporting each other in any way we need. And I trust that's enough.

*Faithful God, no matter what is going on, we remember all of the good things you've done in the past. We know that they are a promise to us, as well. Thank you for the community that you've given us here. Help us lean on you and on each other.*

March 20

Thursday

Revelation 2:8-11

### **Do We Hear the Spirit?**

*Whoever has ears let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Revelation 2:11

In Revelation 2:8-11 and chapter 3, Saint John reports the risen Christ's blame and praise for the ministries of the churches in seven prominent cities of Asia Minor. Christ's evaluations were frank.

At Ephesus, He said the Christians' love for Him had cooled. At Smyrna, their faith was strong, but the persecution they had endured would continue. At Pergamum and Thyatira, they were faithful to God but allowed corrupt teachings in their worship.

Christ had no praise for the church at Sardis because those followers lacked spiritual reality. At Philadelphia, worshipers were faithful despite persecution, but Christ said they must convert those same persecutors. And as to the seventh church in Laodicea, Christ blamed them for worldliness, self-satisfaction, and little zeal for Him.

Today, Christ also challenges us at Reformation as we ponder new possibilities in our ministry. We are no different from the early church members who had to readjust, redefine, and clarify their calling in a changing world.

When Christ was in the desert, He prepared for His ministry by fasting, praying, and denying temptation. We, too, can prepare for ministry expansion by fasting from worldly distractions. We can pray for inspiration and resist the temptation to choose the easy path.

It is no small task to discern the Spirit's voice amid the cacophony of misleading voices in contemporary society. But the Book of Acts reveals the many ways the Spirit communicated with the Apostles, such as in Chapter 15:6-28.

Do we hear the Spirit? Discerning God's will, not our own will, for Reformation's future is a holy process. And implementing it will be a great adventure!

*Holy Spirit, attune our ears to hear you. Lead us in ministry to do God's will. Amen.*

**Comfort and Assurance in God's Presence**

*For you have been my help,  
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.*

Psalm 63:7-8

The view out our living room window includes a far-distant Washington Monument, perched on the horizon. We can always see it. We show it proudly to our visitors. If you shift your gaze to the left you can kind of make out our beleaguered Capitol.

The truth is that the monument is far away and a little hard to find. It is easiest to spot in the early morning, when everything flattens out and the sun hits the monument square on, with no shadows to obscure it. In other words, the surrounding shadows make the sun easier to see.

Somehow, the Lord has always been my sunshine and my help among the shadows. I haven't always seen it, but it is most true for me now, when I find myself comforted and guided under the shadow of God's wings. In the morning I wake up to a new day. I see this, and I croak out a song for joy.

*Lord, help us to find you in the shadows and rejoice in the morning light.*

March 22

Saturday

Isaiah 5:1-7

### **Fruit for Thought**

*When I looked for good grapes, why did they yield only bad grapes? I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed. Isaiah 5:4-6*

In Isaiah 5:1-7 the prophet shares a metaphor about how a man (the Lord) who made wine created an awesome vineyard, but the grapes (the people of Israel) there were awful. Then came the retribution as the winemaker destroyed it all. It was a warning to the people to turn away from their sinfulness, in order to bear good fruit and find favor in God's eyes.

I've really struggled writing this Ashes to Easter reflection. I don't tend to think of our loving God as being a judge, jury and executioner. Which makes me think about my friends who have been summarily dismissed from their jobs by elected and unelected people who are indeed acting as judges, juries and metaphorical executioners. These people being fired are NOT bad fruit. Even if they have been labeled as such by some--none of whom is God I might add.

Look, we all fall short of God's hopes for us sometimes. We do sin, but we are so beloved by God, that as we atone, we are continually forgiven for our shortcomings. And we get up every day and fulfill our vows to be sweeter and give great joy to those around us (yes, like a delicious grape would). This being said, God can be angry and aim his retribution on those who continue to sin and harm others.

My prayer comes from a Hardt Hanson hymn:

*Lord, let my heart be good soil, open to the seed of your Word. Lord, let my heart be good soil, where love can grow and peace is understood.*

### **Figs and a Faithful Gardener**

*“For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?” He replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.” Luke 13:6-9*

I love figs! To me they are one of the tastes of Summer. Despite my love, I’ve never grown a fig tree of my own. Figs, unlike tomatoes or beans or herbs, require years of commitment before they bear fruit. Not very “renter friendly.” Agriculture, even the backyard-gardening kind, engenders a harsh practicality. The purpose of the garden is to bear fruit, and I haven’t planted trees which I won’t be able to nurture and harvest for years to come.

In this reading Jesus serves a double portion of this practicality. The crowd asks Jesus for comfort. They want to know what the Galileans did wrong so they can feel secure in the knowledge that they are safe from a similar fate. But Jesus is not a self-help guru interested in telling us what we want to hear. Jesus tells a hard truth. The dead are no different than anyone else in Jerusalem. Like the fig tree, we must change, repent, and bear fruit, for the axe is waiting.

I struggle with the urgency and immediacy of Jesus’ warnings. Almost 2,000 years after the destruction of Jerusalem it’s comforting to think they no longer apply. Without a clear vision of what exactly “repenting” and “bearing fruit” means in our lives, it is easy to accept Jesus’ chastisement as a hypothetical without actually doing anything. Thankfully, Jesus is our gardener, and he is committed for the long haul. God guides us in our repentance and fertilizes us as we seek to bear fruit. One thing I am sure of is no gardener is interested in hypothetical figs.

*God of the Garden,  
Thank you for nurturing us through one more year. Guide us in our repentance  
this Lenten season that we might bear abundant fruit.  
Amen.*



March 24

Monday

Romans 2:1-11

### **The Righteous Judgement of God**

Excerpt from a sermon preached by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
titled *Beyond Condemnation*:

“How many of us are ready to stone our contemporaries... We so easily see the faults of others. We are so ready to condemn. Yet we never stop to see that some of the sins we are committing are just as bad. Pride, bad temper, refusing to make up a quarrel, spreading lies, indulging in malicious gossip, mental cruelty and social injustice are all terrible sins that we too often think lightly of.

How we turn up our noses at those who commit sins like stealing or drunkenness or murder or crimes of the criminal courts. We think that we should never be tempted to commit them. Surely it comes as a shock to hear Christ saying, ‘But you do things which are far worse.’ You might not rob a bank, but you steal others' good names. You might not be a drunkard, but you are drunk with hate, jealousy.

If our sins were punished in society by Christ's assessment, all of us would be in Jail.

Let us be slow to condemn others. Most of the people we meet in daily life are not hardened hypocrites demanding fierce words. Most of the people we meet are not ... thinking too highly of themselves, but they think too little of themselves. They need to be given new confidence in their power to do the good. They need not our condemnation, but our help. As Jung says in the last chapter of his great work, *Modern Man In Search of A Soul*:

‘Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses. I am the oppressor of the person I condemn, not his friend and fellow sufferer. . . . Modern man has heard enough about guilt and sin. He is sorely beset by his own bad conscience and wants rather to learn how he is to reconcile himself with his own nature, how he is to love the enemy in his own heart and call the wolf his brother. (pp 271, 274)’”

March 25

Tuesday

Ezekiel 17:1-10

### **Planting in Good Soil and with Water**

*“[The Eagle] took the seed of the land and planted it in a fruitful field: he placed it by great waters.”* Ezekiel 17: 5

The prophets in the Old Testament are often given difficult tasks, often complicated by being compelled to speak in parables. These parables are set in the context of the culture of the time, so they may have been more understandable to those who heard them than they are to us. Let us remember, none-the-less, that stones were often thrown at the prophets when they spoke words that were confused as critical.

This parable talks of two eagles and the planting of a seed that first is a tree and then a vine. Although the imagery of the eagles is respondent, the key part is that for the vine to grow, to make its way, and give fruit, the planting must take place in good soil and have access to a source of water.

But what does this say for us today? First, it is God’s coming to us, not our coming to Him. Secondly, in order for our creative fruits to come forth, we must place our seed in good soil, in the community of God’s people. Then, God will come to us in the form of the Holy Spirit to water the seed that we would plant. To fulfill God’s creative plan, we need to place the seeds and receive the inspirational water of the Spirit.

*Holy Trinity, we come to you, invited by your love and grace, to be planters of the good seed that your creation would uphold. Let us not despair over evil but ensure that the good you would have be, is nourished and grows.*

### **Entering God's Rest When Our Work is Complete**

I prepared this devotional far past the deadline with tired eyes and a brain fried from grueling federal government lawyer workdays trying to make sense of the new Presidential proclamations issued since January 20th. Naturally, in this state, my mind snagged on the repetition of the word “rest” because my professional and personal lives have been so catapulted into uncertainty that rest and peace seemed elusive. Indeed, I have cobbled this together in small snatches of time stolen from trying to advise clients on how to dismantle important programs (under threat of termination) to soothing friends who find themselves jobless and demonized after devoting their careers and personal lives to the most noble aspiration of making the world a better place. These pending changes not only threaten careers and financial stability, but aim to dismantle narratives about my core beliefs about service and elevating the needy.

But in these re-readings, I noticed that the word “rest” is used nine times as a meditation on God’s “rest from his works” on the seventh day. But God wasn’t taking a day off from creating the universe - he rested because he had finished his tasks. These verses tell us that there is a Sabbath-rest for believers: “whoever receives that rest which God promised will rest from his own work, just as God rested from his.”

Rest is promised to those who complete their work. We will receive the rest if we have faith, and, like God, complete our important mission. In this moment, my “work” is to stay true and act on my fundamental beliefs, be a good friend and neighbor, and try to get those around us through these times. And if the circumstances arise, knowing when the assigned task will not lead to God’s promised rest.

*Dear God: please help me remain true to your teachings, to complete my work, and to be a balm to those who need it.*

March 27

Thursday

2 Corinthians 4:16—5:5

### **Living by Faith**

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16*

Paul writes to the Corinthians that as our own Earthly bodies deteriorate towards death, our inner faith is renewed each day as we near our heavenly bodies and the newness of life. God has given us the Spirit as a guarantee of our acceptance into heaven.

Have you ever noticed how the elderly seem so “religious” or calm in their faith? They were once middle-aged and went to church, bringing their children along. They were once children, being brought along to church. Yet in their elderly years, it is not “I believe in Christ because I go to church (and the Sunday School teacher told them that they believe in Christ)” or “I go to church because I believe in Christ (and life experiences have informed their belief in Christ or a higher being)”. Rather, the elderly have experienced the daily renewal of their faith by the Holy Spirit throughout the trials of their lives. They know where they have been, and they know where they are going! They know what they have seen; they have faith in the unseen and of their acceptance into heaven.

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,  
And He tells me I am His own.*

From the hymn “In The Garden” (Charles Austin Miles)

### **Leaning In to God's Invitation to Love and Justice**

*You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Psalm 32:7*

What a lovely & comforting message this Psalm carries! It opens: "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered ... Confess your sins to God, and all will be forgiven." This seems like an easy ask! Confess our sins to God and we're all good. It leads me to thinking a little harder about something else, though.

As Lutherans, we believe that we are saved by God's grace, no 'good works' needed. I love that about our faith. As a believer in Christian Universalism myself (the belief that hell doesn't exist, and that if it does, it's empty) this core tenet of Lutheranism seems to drive home this idea that God just loves us all. That's it! Nothing else required, They just love us and extend us grace - so we are saved.

If you're someone who's a little cynical and prone to questions (like I am) you may wonder, then - What's the point of being a good person? This is something that came up during my pre-Baptism conversations with Pastor Ben Hogue in 2021. If we're all saved, why bother? Pastor Ben had an answer for me that I've been chewing on ever since. God's love is an invitation - and we get to decide if we lean into it.

Our God is a God of justice and of love, and They call us to the same. As humans though, we all know just how tough it can be to live a life of justice and love. There are hurt feelings standing in the way of forgiveness and personal risks to speaking out against cruelty. Verse 7 of this Psalm offers me comfort, reminding us, "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance." As we lean into God's invitation, we know that we can take refuge in God Themselves.

*Dear God, remind us that you are always with us, especially when we are doing the hard things in your name. Remind us that by your grace, we are inherently worthy of your love. Amen.*

March 29

Saturday

Exodus 32:7-14

### **The Golden Calf**

*And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt [it] in the fire, and ground [it] to powder, and straved [it] upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink [of it]. Exodus 32:7-14, 20*

What are we to make of this strange story? As I see it, when Moses disappears for 40+ days into Mount Sinai, the people become inconsolably anxious. Paranoia and chaos sweep through the camp – and the deeply held belief in the old gods emerges to comfort the people. Priest Aaron's bizarre response is to take the gold earrings of the Hebrews and melt them to make a calf-shaped sculpture like the Egyptian god Apis. Pagan rituals – some old, some new – spring up overnight around the idol. It takes Moses pleading with God to stop a catastrophic annihilation of the Israelites. At the end of the story we learn that 3,000 people died in conflicts over the return to normalcy; and that the children of Israel are made to drink (or kiss) the ground-up powder of gold that remains of the destroyed statue – possibly, according to scholars, to determine who still secretly holds a love of the idol.

Is the story about what fear and paranoia will do to a people who should know better? Or how our old beliefs emerge when we are under pressure, as comforting tropes? Or, how God does not understand human frailty and immaturity, until a human intermediary pleads with God? Finally, why the drinking of the golden powder?

My own takeaway dwells on the metaphor of swallowing something that reveals a person for who they really are; an apple (as in the story of Adam and Eve) or a gold powder to reveal allegiances.

When we eat the bread and drink the wine we reveal who we are. We believe that God came to us as a human, and dwelled among us, and gave to us the deepest metaphor and reality of communion with God.

*God our creator, through Christ you could not be more clear about your enduring love for all people. Help us grow in faith so that when we commune at the table we show who we are, your beloved children seeking righteousness, peace, and love in a world full of disbelievers and false idols.*

March 30

Sunday

Luke 15:1-3; 11b-32

### **Lost and Found**

*We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.* Luke 15:32

The story of the Prodigal Son is familiar to most people with even a passing knowledge of the Bible. It is a vivid story with its imagery of a young man so desperate for nourishment he is envious of the pigs' food. It is almost deceptively simple in its message— come home where you are loved.

It almost hurts to read this story as a parent. The thought that your child could go off on their own and be in danger or hungry or alone is heart wrenching. I “get” the dad in this story. It's easy to relate to both sons, too. I know I've been guilty of demanding praise for my steadfast faithfulness. I know I've been lost and found.

This Lenten season, when our minds and hearts are occupied by so much distraction and pain, let us take the straightforward message to heart: return to the Lord. God celebrates you and rejoices in you.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for enfolding us in your love every time we are lost and return to you. Help us to be as loving as you.*

### **The Day of Atonement - Returning to our God**

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Now, the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you: you shall humble yourselves and present the Lord's offering by fire, and you shall do no work during that entire day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God. Leviticus 23:26-28*

The Day of Atonement is a holy day devoted to introspection, repentance, and reconciliation with God. God promises to bless those who are faithful to his covenant and punish those who disobey. This passage calls us to lay bare our souls, take responsibility for our actions, seek forgiveness, and rekindle our devotion, returning to our God.

We live in a time when multitasking is the norm and interruptions are constant. I believe it's more important than ever to create the time and space for introspection and deep contemplation. Whether you choose to keep a day of complete rest, to fast, or to meditate and pray, it's a chance to dedicate ourselves to matters of the spirit. We may ask ourselves questions like, "What actions have I taken that have caused harm to others?" "How have I strayed from the path of righteousness?" Or "What can I do to make amends to and seek forgiveness from those I have wronged?"

This journey of personal and spiritual growth offers an opportunity to align our hearts to God's will and, hopefully, find inner peace. When we do so, we are able to cleanse our souls and renew our commitment to living a life guided by compassion and forgiveness.

*Merciful God, help us through the genuine act of turning back to You for forgiveness, so that we may feel the healing and renewal of our relationship with You. Amen.*



April 1

Tuesday

Leviticus 25:1-18

### **The Jubilee Year**

*Hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty...*

*Return, everyone of you, to your property and every one of you to your family.*

Leviticus 25:10, 13

The Jubilee Year – a celebration of the Hebrew people’s freedom from bondage – occurred every fifty years. Built on smaller cycles of rest, from the weekly Sabbath day to an every-seven-year resting of the land, the fiftieth-year Jubilee was the ultimate celebration of liberty. The message: Stop working the land and go home to your family!

For many of us, going home is challenging business, bringing perhaps some joy, but also some hesitation or unease. Returning to family may seem less than totally good news or even antithetical to freedom. With all the ways to celebrate, the Bible’s instruction to go home to our families may seem a hard path.

I believe that the chance for real freedom begins at home. It’s not easy. Holding on to oneself, sharing one’s own thinking and own principles while, at the same time, expressing genuine interest – and less reactivity, possibly – to the views of other family members, these are challenging processes. Curiosity about the back story can help. Over time, a person can begin to understand what other family members were up against and can start making peace with the past.

Scripture gives notable direction on the Jubilee. “You shall count off...” (v.8), it says, with specific detail on counting. Plan ahead, become more intentional about rest! The Jubilee reminder that life is more than work brings a responsibility to structure our time differently. In the end, thoughtful resting may lead to more self-awareness, from which all relationships can grow.

*Our father in heaven, who gave us families, help us to grow in understanding of our family members and of ourselves, that we might live together in peace and hope. Amen.*

April 2

Wednesday

Psalm 126

### **A Harvest of Joy**

*For gladness will radiate out for all to see. So great is your Presence among us.*  
Psalm 126:3

A neighbor just called to ask permission to put signs on our lawn. I eagerly consented. This is across the street from a neighbor who published a database of all Diversity, Equity and Inclusion DEI contacts for this new treacherous administration. This was bringing politics very near to home. The signs read:

- ◆ Live Your Religion
- ◆ Hate Has No Home in Cheverly
- ◆ Hate, Fear, Revenge Don't Make a Country Great
- ◆ Other Groups Opposed to DEI: KKK and Nazis
- ◆ Cheverly Says, "No!" to White Supremacy
- ◆ What Would Jesus Do? He'd say, "Shame on You!"
- ◆ Jesus was a Poor, Brown, Palestinian, Refugee
- ◆ There is No Longer Jew or Gentile, Slave or Free, Male or Female. For You are All One in Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:28
- ◆ Which of these are you against? Diversity? Equity? Inclusion? Accessibility?

The neighbor texted me saying, "There is a group of people on your lawn putting up signs. I am home with my three children, and I am scared." I thought, "Oh you put other people in danger, but think these signs are scary!" She complained later in the day that neighbors were coming by and taking pictures. She stated, "These were libelous!"

By about noon, Cheverly's mayor, our first Black female mayor called and asked permission to take the signs down. She said, "The point has been made. In my experience continuing isn't a good idea." I relented. She returned them to the original instigator, the neighbor who had asked permission to install them in the first place to be posted around town in a less targeted way.

*Dear Creator,*

*Do not let me stand by while others are persecuted. Help me stand up for my beliefs and for what is right during this very trying time. Your radical presence is felt by all! In Your Holy Name, Amen.*

April 3

Thursday

Isaiah 43:1-7

### I Am Enough

*When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire,  
you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.* Isaiah 43:2-4

When I read this passage, I burst into tears. I sometimes don't connect to Bible passages--sometimes they say things that I find undesirable--but I'm very touched and moved by this. The lines here especially moved me, reminding me of this one time I prayed a rosary. I was having a panic attack, crying in fear, and suddenly, I felt a presence and a feeling that I was enough. There was another time when I read a mug saying, "Do not be afraid, for I am the Lord, thy god, and I am with you."

It makes me feel simultaneously lonely and comforted. I'm currently homeless, and while it's nice to go to church and go on walks or find other ways of enjoying life, at the end of the day, I often feel empty and alone, questioning the worth of my existence. Then, when I hear the words, "I am with you," I feel this safe warmth that I'm not used to--and then I notice the gaping hole that the warmth is filling. I feel God's presence filling my heart, and then I feel it empty out again. God cannot be with me, filling that hole all the time. And so I cry.

But I have myself, and I know--though I can't yet see them--I'm not alone. That helps. To those of you who are alone in those moments, I see you, and so do the divine.

*Dear comforting god, you and Lady Mary gave me warmth and company that one day. Let me feel your presence again so I may hold on to that wonder and remember that I am enough.*

### Pruning Ourselves for Each Other

*I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ...But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs...Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.*  
Philippians 2:20-21, 25, 3:1

This passage reminds me as we seek a return to God it is also a return to each other as well. Paul shows us in both Timothy and Epaphroditus some of the characteristics we need on our journey. Paul himself shows us how we can be clear eyed about the darker aspects of our reality while still finding joy and connection in community while imprisoned. Within this passage we see the result of lives lived with the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control available to us from the Holy Spirit through the process of sanctification. We are justified by the grace of God to be sanctified for his purposes. In this season I remind myself that the process of sanctification calls me to ask to participate with God in order to be the daughter, sister, soldier, laborer, and messenger for Christ I'm called to be.

The final line is the beginning of the next chapter where Paul speaks of the false teachers the Philippians are to avoid. Here I take it as an admonition that finding my joy in the unchanging nature of God is my best protection from not walking out this journey with the love and faith that pleases Christ. Only then can I be the member of the body I am needed to be during this time.

*Abba, help me to submit myself to the pruning you need to do in me so that I may be more conformed to your image. Grow me into the person you need me to be within our church and in the world to call others to you through my actions. In Christ I pray. Amen.*

April 5

Saturday

Exodus 12:21-27

### **The First Passover**

*For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. Exodus 12:23-25*

In the first Passover, Moses tells the Israelites to publicly demonstrate their faith in God. He instructs them to scatter lamb's blood across their door frames to mark their houses as places of refuge. The Israelites trust that this will protect their families as God sends an angel through Egypt, killing the first-born sons of the Egyptians. Even after years of bitter enslavement where the Israelites' faith that they would ever break free from Egypt was tested, when Moses told them to proclaim their faith in the Lord, they did.

As I studied this passage, I thought of all the ways we publicly and privately proclaim our faith. Sometimes it's a yard sign or a T-shirt, other times it's showing up to bag meals for the food pantry or finding furniture for a newly-arrived refugee family. As we discern our way through these next few years, we must continue to loudly demonstrate our faith in God, not just by praising his name on Sundays, but in the work we do every day.

Just as the Israelites publicly proclaimed their faith on their door frames, we must follow their example, passing on this rite to the next generation by professing our faith in God both in word and in loud deed.

For each of us, that could look like many ordinary things, from offering compassion to a neighbor or family member with whom we disagreed, bringing a meal to a grieving friend to defending someone at work we believe has been unjustly maligned.

The extraordinary act of publicly professing our faith in God through this ministry and work, however seemingly ordinary, will protect us, just as the Israelites' bloody door frames protected them.

*Lord, help us to find the strength to publicly and loudly profess our faith in you and in each other. Help us find the resolve to press forward for justice, peace, and love. Amen.*

April 6

Sunday

John 12:1-8

**“...But Me You Have Not Always”**

*“...the poor you always have with you: but me you have not always.”*  
John 12:8

Consider the cultural context. Washing for the Jewish community was an aspect of good health, but washing also was a sign of reverence. Coming into a residence, one washed off the dust of the world. Mary knows the holiness of Jesus. He raised her brother from the dead. She enhances the process by adding a costly ointment and then makes the washing very personal by drying the feet of Jesus with her hair. Can you enter into this moment? Can you see Mary kneeling at the feet of Jesus? Can you feel the pure love Mary has for Jesus?

Judas interrupts the moment, suggesting it would have been better to sell the ointment and give the profit to the poor. Jesus interjects that Mary had been saving the ointment for the time of his death but is it better to use in while he is still alive. Jesus adds that he is not always going to be with us but the poor and their needs will be.

What is Jesus saying? We always will need to be God’s hands; our work will never end but always be there. The intersection of oppression does not easily go away. Still, at times we need to turn to God, who is always ready to replenish us in our trials with his love and grace. In such moments none of the world matters, only experiencing the creative love of God. It is a moment of rapture.

*Lord Jesus, we would give ourselves to honor your sacrifice and gift to us of grace. Let us remember that we live both times of holy contemplation of you and also times of enabling others.*

April 7

Monday

Hebrews 10:19-25

### **A Call to Persevere**

Hope is a crushed stalk  
Between clenched fingers  
Hope is a bird's wing  
Broken by a stone.  
Hope is a word in a tuneless ditty —  
A word whispered with the wind,  
A dream of forty acres and a mule,  
A cabin of one's own and a moment to rest,  
A name and place for one's children  
And children's children at last . . .  
Hope is a song in a weary throat.  
Give me a song of hope  
And a world where I can sing it.  
Give me a song of faith  
And a people to believe in it.  
Give me a song of kindness  
And a country where I can live it.  
Give me a song of hope and love  
And a brown girl's heart to hear it.

*-Dark Testament: Verse 8 by Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray*

April 8

Tuesday

Psalm 20

### **Prayer for Victory**

What is the opposite of being faithful?

Is it being angry at God or at a neighbor? Perhaps speaking out against the existence of God is the opposite. Or it's willfully sinning.

Psalm 40 speaks of waiting patiently for God, being aware of our sin, and being delivered by God. It speaks of people - who are gratified by our disgrace and who say "aha" - finding shame in themselves.

Perhaps the opposite of being faithful – is despair. The opposite is refusing to wait to see what God will do with our sin and how God will rescue us from the pit. Perhaps it is refusing to ask for God's help or to name God after the rescue.

*God, help me to wait patiently and to name you.*



April 9

Wednesday

Habakkuk 3:2-15

**How Long, Oh Lord, Must I call for Help, and You Do Not Listen?**

*Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, oh Lord.  
Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember  
mercy. Habakkuk 3:2-3*

The prophet Habakkuk openly laments God's apparent indifference to the prevalence of evil: "Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? There is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted."

Honestly, God's initial answer to Habakkuk is not very reassuring: "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor".

2,500+ years later, we still ask the same question, and find that God has raised up another prophet:

*I know you are asking today, how long will it take?....  
I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however  
frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth crushed to earth will rise  
again.  
How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.  
How long? Not long, because you shall reap what you sow....  
How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends  
toward justice."*

—Martin Luther King, March 25, 1965, Montgomery Alabama

Perhaps MLK found some grounding in Habakkuk for his steadfast belief in God's eventual assurance of justice: "For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it, it will certainly come and will not delay. ... For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea".

*Dear God, thank you for the knowledge that in spite of present hardship, one  
can continue to make progress and move forward with hope for the future.*

### Warning to Pay Attention

*So God has put everything under his Son. Everything is under his control. We do not now see everything under his control. But we do see Jesus already given a crown of glory and honor. He was made lower than the angels for a little while. He suffered death. By the grace of God, he tasted death for everyone. That is why he was given his crown. Hebrews 2:8b-9.*

This text reminds me of the lessons that I ignored as a child. I remember dozens of weekends sitting at my grandmother's table when she would give me advice while we ate dinner or watched Jeopardy. She would tell me not to lie and I lied anyway. She told me not to spend too much time playing video games and I did anyway. She told me to be quick to forgive, and I struggled to do that anyway (and I still do sometimes).

Regardless, she never stopped loving me. For the most part, I've learned those lessons now, after my share of missteps. I like to think that she smirks somewhere in heaven every time I make one of those mistakes and think to myself: I should have just done what she told me to do! Those memories remind me of the finale of one of my favorite musicals, *Into the Woods*, which contains the line, "Children may not obey, but children will listen."

I believe this text describes a similar dynamic. God has shown us the path we ought to take, through his signs, wonders, and Son. Still, we cannot help but forget and we continually walk astray. Regardless, God's love is constant.

*Heavenly Father, please guide us back to your path when we wander away from it. Help us to pay attention, and to remember the signs and wonders you have shown us. — Amen.*

**Prayer and Praise for Deliverance from Enemies**

*Let your favor shine on your servant.*

*In your unfailing love, rescue me.*

Psalm 31:16

We go to Psalms for comfort during times of struggle. In these verses David wrote of helplessness and hopelessness in the face of rejection and hate. Jesus quotes Psalm 31 when he is hanging on the cross, and more than any other Psalm, it reflects someone who is in complete emotional distress.

As a church at the doorstep of the U.S. Capitol, we are a congregation that is both a witness to and a victim of the dramatic changes being made to the federal workforce, justified as a purge of the “enemies from within”. Division and the distortion of truth is an animating feature of those in power today, dependent on ordinary people and their sense of despair to stoke race, class and gender divisions, appeal to nativism and ungodly desires.

Although our enemies may seem to have the upper hand, they are ultimately the helpless and hopeless ones. They do not have God’s spirit in them, leading them to punch at shadows.

In life's most distressing moments, when our strength fails and the world crushes us, we can find assurance in the words, "You are my God." It is the very essence of Jesus’ name – “God saves”.

*Dear God, these stressful and uncertain times require us to depend on you for protection, to pull us from the traps our enemies have set. Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am weary, my soul burdened with sorrow. Yet it is in you I place my trust. You are my refuge, O God—my rock, my fortress. Deliver us from those who seek harm. Let your face shine upon us, and in your steadfast love, save us.*

April 12

Saturday

Luke 22:1-13

### **The Preparation of the Passover**

You won't smell soup cooking yet  
or cake or kugel or tzimmes baking  
on the day before Passover.

There's just the sight of empty  
cupboards, counters crowded with  
hametz, boxes of cereal, cans of  
beans, jars of jelly.

The oven is cleaning itself  
this year, but not the racks.  
I'll scrub them with a Brillo pad  
until my arms and fingers ache  
and the silver gleams and the  
stains of the past year wash off  
with the soapsuds down the drain.

Before long I'll wipe the crust of crumbs  
off the inside of the oven and I'll wipe  
all the countertops and the table, too, and

I'll put away the toaster (after cleaning  
it out) and begin stocking the shelves  
with boxes of matzah and jars of  
gefilte fish.

And soon that which we eat throughout  
the year will be forbidden, and that which  
we don't eat will be what we eat

and our stomachs will shrink with our new  
diet, and it will be Passover, and we'll know  
we are slaves again, hungry for what we

don't have, and the hunger will remind us  
of our suffering at the hands of the Egyptians  
and once again will bring us closer to those  
who suffer, enslaved, today.

—*Food, Faith and Family: Three Poems for Passover* by Bruce Black

April 13

Palm Sunday

Luke 19:28-40

### **Walking with the Lord**

*Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'"* Luke 19:30-31

In this passage, we see a model of listening to and walking with the Lord. His disciples trust and follow the directions Jesus has given them. They find the colt, bring it to Jesus, and cover it with some of their own clothing to support him as he rides the young donkey. There is no mention of bolting or bucking. The colt accepts Jesus' weight and the path they follow is made more comfortable as many people lay down their clothing for Jesus to pass.

This is a story of submission. A donkey, never ridden before, is accepting a rider. Further, the crowd is cheering for their king. Wouldn't this make the colt nervous?

The followers make haste to go to town and fetch the donkey for Jesus. They are submitting to his directives and decisions. They are living this moment of their lives in perfect submission to the Son's will.

Let us take a moment to reflect on how we are submitting to the faith-filled plan for our lives. Do you have time for prayer-filled meditation and straight-talking conversations with God? How do you know and understand God's will for your life? Ponder opportunity for submission to the will of the Lord in your own life this season.

*Heavenly Father, as I listen for Your will, in prayer-filled meditation, please guide me as my hearing is not always keen. Support me on this journey with the love of your faithful followers. Amen*

April 14

Monday

Hebrews 9:11-15

### **Christ Redeems for Eternal Life**

*For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

Hebrews 9:15

God was not pleased with the man made-superficial cleansing of one by using the blood of animals to temporarily cleanse one's sins, known as the old covenant. Therefore, God sent his son Jesus to save us from sin by bearing his own blood. The blood of Christ is the one and only true blood, not temporary but permanent, so that we may be free of sins and by accepting God as the one and only Father whom has promised and provided us eternal life through baptism.

The blood of Christ sanctifies our hearts and cleanses our consciences. As Christians, we learn to build a healthy and happy relationship with Christ and through Christ to do his will of not only keeping his messages of joy within ourselves but sharing with others that may still be wondering through the wilderness looking for an eternal home and not a temporary one.

Every time I receive communion and embrace the words of the Holy Communion I am reminded how blessed and thankful for Jesus' unconditional love by completing God's plan to save me.

*Heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for sending your son, who not only suffered for us but continues to walk with us daily. Amen.*

April 15

Tuesday

Isaiah 49:1-7

### **You Do Not Labor in Vain**

*And (the Lord) said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” But I said, “I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity...”* Isaiah 49:3-4

One of the nuggets in Isaiah 49:1-7 is this bit. Isaiah is calling FAR and WIDE for God’s servants to wake up and understand they are God’s polished arrows, hidden in a quiver.

He will go on to shout to them God’s desire — “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (even the Gentiles!) — but at this moment the servant is lost in their own humility and meekness. How utterly Lutheran.

Last year I helped write the script for a gala celebration recognizing award winners and lifetime achievement honorees. Our organization doesn’t have deep pockets for flashy awards, so I tried to write some really touching stories and inside jokes about the honorees into the script as a way of saying “we know you and we love you” — a big rhetorical hug.

But in the end, the speakers were uncomfortable delivering even touching anecdotes or loving quips. I realized it takes courage for people even to say nice, little things if they’re charged with real emotion. The script was gutted, the hugs were un-hugged.

Isaiah begs us to get over ourselves, get out of our shells and serve. (Even the Gentiles!)

My favorite prayers are short. God’s time is precious and we needn’t prattle on. I love the devastating simplicity and inherent, deep gratitude of the table grace, “Lord, forgive us for feasting while others starve.”

So I’ll keep it short.

*“Lord, please don’t let me be the dud who worries I might labor in vain rather than getting down to your work.”*

April 16

Wednesday

John 13:21-32

### **Allowing Betrayal for God's Purposes**

*When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him." John 13:31*

Jesus walks us through his very human and also very godly reaction to betrayal with a Kingdom purpose. This is no minor betrayal but one that will cost him his life but save ours for eternity. He shows us that our path may end up having moments of betrayal from those we love, trust, and pour our time, talent, and treasure into who will cause us pain and loss. Sometimes unlike Jesus, those betrayals may have a purpose that God has not shown us yet. As the old saying goes, "The saddest part about betrayal is that it never comes from your enemies." We expect our enemies to harm us but when the ones we love and trust are the cause of the pain what are we to do? We are called to do just what we would do if it were our enemy, walk in love.

*Lord, cultivate in me such a deep well of your love my brothers and sisters in Christ that even in moments when I am hurt by them, I will continue to walk in love.*



April 17

Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17; 31b-35

### **Jesus's New and Radical Commandment**

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”* John 13:34

How could the simple act of loving be considered “new” and radical? As difficult as it may be for us to believe, given today’s headlines, Jesus was born into a world even more brutal, hierarchical, and inequitable than our own. Rome ruled its empire with merciless severity. Slavery was an accepted fact of life. An individual’s primary allegiance was to one’s tribe or village and anyone outside that limited circle was not worthy of your respect or compassion. “An eye for an eye” was the ethos of the day. Jesus directs his followers to reject the world order as they know it by adopting a new way of being in the world: to love; everyone; no exceptions. Rejecting old hierarchies and exclusionary systems to embrace all of humanity as worthy of our love is an inherently radical act.

Jesus reinforces this command through the simple act of foot washing. His disciples are aghast that the Son of God would stoop so low and engage in the humiliating activity of washing their dirty feet – a lowly act reserved for servants or slaves. Peter, indignant, initially refuses, but Jesus admonishes him: “If I do not wash you, you have no part in me.” Jesus is explicit that this is a teaching moment – by choosing foot washing to show care for his disciples, he makes clear that no person is above – or below – another. And he then commands them to wash each other’s feet just as he did. Jesus teaches us that everyone deserves our care and kindness, and no one is above the station of providing it.

Jesus is close to his death, and he knows it. He has chosen this moment carefully to bestow this commandment of love. The love that Jesus is requiring of us is not the sentimental love of romantic novels. It is instead, in the words of writer Gary Wills: “exigent, searing, terrifying”. Why? Because it is by this simple and profound act that we shall all be ultimately judged – love is the ultimate test. Jesus tells us that loving others as he loves us is the only path to God.

*Lord, strengthen me and guide me to follow your example to love my neighbors freely and completely.*

April 18

Good Friday

John 18:1—19:42

### **The Passion and Death of Jesus**

*They took the body of Jesus.* John 19:40a

I feel a temptation, on Good Friday, to try to pin down the meaning of this day—to locate the blessing in one moment, one word, one action. I looked for it in Jesus' last breath and in the steadfast presence of the women who would not leave his side. I found myself searching for it in the breaking of his body, and in the hands that prepared him for burial.

But the harder I look, the more I find that this blessing does not stay still. It moves, shifting from one moment to another, refusing to be contained. It lingers in the spaces where grief and love intertwine. And perhaps that is the deepest mystery of Good Friday—that even in the breaking, something holy abides.

Today, I'm reading this text as an invitation to stop searching and simply sit in the silence. To resist the urge to name or resolve what is unfinished. To wait, to watch, to be still in the presence of a blessing that is surely moving, even when my words fail to contain it.

*God of waiting and wonder, in the breaking, in the silence, in the spaces we do not understand—abide with us. Still our searching, quiet our need for answers, and lead us to a moment's rest in You. Amen.*

April 19

Easter Vigil

Matthew 27:57-66

### **When It Was Evening**

*And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb. Matthew 27:59-60*

The Romans could have left the bodies of Jesus and the two other executed men hanging. The horror and stench of the criminals' rotting corpses would have reminded the Jewish people of their lowly status as a conquered nation. But Jesus of Nazareth had threatened the Jewish priestly leadership more than the Roman governor: when Joseph of Arimathea asked for Jesus' body, Pilate "ordered it to be given to him."

Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council. He was a rich man and someone who had the status to solicit Pilate with his request. The gospel also states that he was a follower of Jesus. It could be that Joseph's primary motivation was to obey Deuteronomic law (Deuteronomy 21: 22-23) when he took Jesus' body to bury him before the end of the day of crucifixion. We don't really know. Was he motivated by his opposition to the political machinations of the high priests and Pharisees? Was he a distant relative to Jesus and felt duty-bound to retrieve the body?

Whatever his motivation or inspiration, Joseph showed compassion by taking on the task of burial; it would have been too dangerous—perhaps too expensive—for the Disciples to carry out. And Joseph showed his respect and love for Jesus, honoring him and giving him a distinguished burial by wrapping his body in new linen and laying him in a newly-hewn sepulcher.

*Lord Jesus, help us to honor you and give you distinction as our teacher and healer. Take our actions and infuse them with respect and love. Amen.*

**Easter**

*Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 1 Corinthians 15:24-25*

When we think of the resurrection, we see the women going to anoint him, suddenly caught off guard by an angel. We see Peter peeking in to see just the graveclothes, and we announce each year that Christ the Lord is Risen! We understand that Christ, as the firstborn of the dead, makes us alive as heirs: we who suffer also shall reign with Him. We die together, and we rise together. We are justified by grace through faith, and Death has been put to death! Alleluia!

But beyond these spiritual implications, there are also some very real and tangible byproducts which also come to mind, particularly at rough times like these. Paul's letter to the Corinthians reminds us of other things being put asunder, too—worldly domination, unchecked power crushing the powerless underfoot, authority taken, not earned or given, and the list goes on.

God-in-Christ's rising is not only a repudiation of death, but a resistance against unchecked power and self-aggrandizing authority that tried, but simply could not kill the Lord of Glory. And we've experienced many a death this year already, little ones and big ones. But since Jesus has risen, you and I can rise, too—and we can do so with hope that the ultimate intention is that the powers become subject to The Power, and that from under Christ's pierced foot, no peep of Domination's prior roar can be heard.

“You may write me down in history with your bitter twisted lies.  
You may trod me in the very dirt, but still, like dust, I'll rise.”

-from Maya Angelou, *Still I Rise*

## ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

March 5th GLORIA KENYON, enjoys the theological challenge of writing for FATE every year and is grateful for all the behind-the-scenes work that goes into making it happen. Gloria lives in Silver Spring with her husband, Greg; son, Ben; and the Black Dog Detective Agency, which is comprised of two rescue dogs, Max and Link.

March 6th ANDY WEAVER grew up in central Ohio, attended college in Maine and ended up in DC.

March 7th JUDITH MANGUBAT is a long-term Reformation member with vivid memories of congregation history.

March 8th JULIE HASLER is a long-time member of Reformation (since about 1990), who previously served on the Council as recently as 2020. She has been working in D.C. since 1989 and currently works in government affairs for a medical device manufacturing company based in Indiana. Julie is an active member of the Capitol Hill Tennis Club and resides in Arlington, Virginia. She enjoys being an aunt to 17 nieces and nephews and a great niece.

March 9th PETER POON, at the time of this writing, looks forward to retiring from the Federal Government after 30 years of public service. He and his husband Marcos DaCruz plan to split their retirement years between sunny Miami Beach and Washington, DC, where they can worship and fellowship with their beloved community at Reformation.

March 10th CAITLIN JACOBS has been a member of Reformation since 2005. She lives in Wheaton with her husband Paul, toddler Clíodhna, and cat Molly.

March 11th EVAN SCHRAGE currently serves as President of the Church Council. He has been a member of Reformation since 2019. He lives in Northeast DC, and you can usually spot him in a coat and tie zipping along on his scooter.

March 12th EVAN R. CHRISTOPHER joined Reformation in 2021. He enjoys volunteering at Reformation as a reader, handyman, baker, and choir member. Originally from Oregon, he lives in northwest D.C. with his wife, Kate, and their dog, Tito.

March 13th MATT COOK is an attorney at the Securities and Exchange Commission. He has attended Reformation since 2005 and serves as an usher and on the Engagement & Communications Committee. He and his partner, Patrick, live in Adams Morgan.

March 14th KIRSTEN PETREE joined Lutheran Church of the Reformation in 2005, with her husband Corey and daughter Ella. She is part of the Stream Team and enjoys walking (and wine) with the newly launched Empty Nesters club. Kirsten works for NASA Science as Executive Officer/Chief of Staff.

March 15th NANCY SWINGLE is learning to adjust to living without Al. She is grateful for the love and support from the Reformation community.

March 16th KATHRYN TOBIAS, a Reformation member since 1977, loves writing, assisting refugees through Good Neighbors of Capitol Hill, leading the Metro DC ELCA Global Mission Committee, singing with the Reformation choir and Arioso, traveling, and gathering with family and friends in nearby Cheverly and beyond.

March 17th KATIE EVANS joined the Reformation community in August with her partner, Vicar Jayme. She is a deacon serving in the ELCA.

March 18th MATT AVILES lives in Capitol Hill and has been attending Reformation since 2017, where he is involved with the Youth Group and the Finance Committee. Matt is a huge sports fan, particularly of Duke basketball, the Caps, and whatever soccer match is on at the time. He loves to explore new parts of the city, so if you have any good tips, send them his way.

March 19th MOLLY HIGGINS has been a member of Reformation since 2017. She's a member of the Social Justice Committee, makes sure the Crab Boil happens every June (it's June 14, 2025), and is definitely still a young adult.

March 20th JULIETTE JONES likes to write prayers, psalms, meditations and hymn lyrics, and has done a few of those in her three decades of membership at Reformation. She also sings in the choir. Juliette and her husband have four children who were baptized and confirmed at Reformation, and three grandchildren.

March 21st EVA STEEGE worked in the office at Reformation in the late 90's before she entered the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. She served as pastor in the New England and the Metropolitan DC Synods before retiring in 2020. She and her husband, Ted, live in College Park.

March 22nd MONICA FITZGERALD is one of 7 children, so grew up learning that life isn't always fair (since most things come in boxes of 6). After teaching high school for 4 years, she was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guatemala and then spent most of her career at GSA, retiring in 2024. She is musical, athletic, and extroverted. Her greatest joys are her marriage to Susanne, and being mom to Danny (17) and Benji (15).

March 23rd JOEL MEDFORD has been a member of Reformation for about a year and enjoys participating in the Young Adult Bible Study. He works remotely for a consulting firm based in Atlanta.

March 24th MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

March 25th PHILIP W. MOELLER, the son of a Lutheran Pastor, graduated from St. Olaf College and has a MA and PhD. in International Relations and Development. He has specialized in institutional dynamics as a key to sustainable development, addressing governance, public ownership, ethics, social and environmental impact, and inclusivity for the State Department, USAID, UNDP, the Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank.

March 26th DINA FINKEL has lived on the Hill for ten years and been a member of Reformation since 2019. She is a member of the Church Council and the Service & Justice Committee, and enjoys spending time with her dog, her friends, exploring DC and the world, and placing an unmanageable amount of holds at the DC Public Library.

March 27th KAREN CARLSON has been a member of LCOR since 1988 and is the coordinator of our Food Pantry.

March 28th KIRI NICHOLSON has been a member of Reformation since 2019. She enjoys life with her partner and 2 cats.

March 29th SARAH STAUDERMAN loves the community of Church of the Reformation, where she has worshipped for over 27 years. She and her husband Andrew Robb live on Capitol Hill with Sasha the elderly corgi, and Melli, the deaf ginger cat. Their son Frederic is a junior in college in California.

March 30th IVY FINKENSTADT is a long-time Reformation member. She teaches Sunday School and coordinates and edits From Ashes to Easter.

March 31st REBECCA CHRISTIANE PFAHL is a long-time member of Reformation. She has participated in the choir, Bible Study and book club, finding joy in fellowship.

April 1st BARBARA LAYMON is a Capitol Hill neighbor, author, family systems counselor, and avid Nationals fan. Her latest book, All the Families of the Earth: Therapists in Bible Times, was published by Wipf and Stock.



April 2nd ELIZABETH TUCKERMANTY loves the new energy at Reformation and wants to stand committed to supporting the disadvantaged in this society.

April 3rd JACKIE PFAHL (they/them) frequently attends the 11 o'clock worship service and is a regular online attendee with their mom, Rebecca.

April 4th KERRY HYDRICK has been a member of Reformation for 2 years as of March 2025 and is a member of the Stream Team.

April 5th MARCIA BROWN is a relative newcomer to Reformation and a member of the Church Council. She enjoys singing in the choir and getting to know the congregation.

April 6th PHILIP W. MOELLER, has served on the Board of the Global Mission Division of the ELCA, and in 2017 was awarded a bronze medal for 50 years of International Service by Johns Hopkins University. He served on the Board of Reconciling Works as Director of International Programs. He chairs the Worship, Music and Arts Committee at Reformation. He also chairs the Metro DC Synod RIC team.

April 7th REV. DR. PAULI MURRAY is a poet.

April 8th MELISSA LORD joined Reformation in 2018 with her daughter Eleanor and son Larson. Melissa's husband Bill is a frequent visitor as well. Melissa is a nurse and loves playing piano.

April 9th PETER HEIM is a long-time member of Reformation. He lives on Capitol Hill with his wife Laurie and enjoys the weekly blessing of being a part of this community.

April 10th SHIVA MICHAEL SETHI is a member of Reformation and has been attending for the last couple of years. He is an attorney and an avid college basketball fan.

April 11th KRISTINA WILFORE is a new member of Reformation and global advocate for strengthening democracy and fighting for justice.

April 12th BRUCE BLACK is a poet.

April 13th CANDACE LILYQUIST is a retired educator and organizational development specialist. She worked for multiple education associations across the United States over the past 26 years. Previously, she was a teacher in Texas and Minnesota. She is a committed activist in service of maintain and improving a public system of learning for all. Candace is a life-long Lutheran and graduated from Concordia College\* in Moorhead, Minnesota.

\* Concordia College is an ELCA institution. She also has a green thumb and looks forward to growing things in this next chapter of life.

April 14th JACKIE MADDOX has been a member of Reformation for over a year. She loves socializing, spending time with her two grands and traveling.

April 15th JONATHAN ERNST is better known at Reformation as Emily Sollie's husband and intermittent pew-mate, although between them he is the natural-born Lutheran. They have been members of Reformation for about twenty years. He is a photojournalist and grew up in suburban Atlanta.

April 16th KERRY HYDRICK has been a member of Reformation for 2 years as of March 2025 and is a member of the Stream Team.

April 17th CRAIG MIDDLEBROOK, has been a member of Reformation since 1990. He currently serves on the Church Council and is chair of the current capital campaign. His children, Ella (21) and Henry (25), were baptized and confirmed at Reformation. He lives in Falls Church, Virginia, with his wife, Stacey Helberg.

April 18th JAYME KOKKONEN is thrilled to serve as Reformation's vicar for the 2024-2025 year. This community is not only shaping her pastoral identity, but deepening her belief in the power of church as a space of rest and resistance. Vicar Jayme lives with her partner, Katie, and their foster-fail pup, Merton.

April 19th VALERIE ANNA PLATZ is a long-time member of Church of the Reformation. She sings with the choir and is currently serving on the RC3 (capital campaign committee). Valerie lives in Arlington, Virginia.

April 20th PASTOR KEVIN VANDIVER is the Senior Pastor at LCOR.

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