A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding the handle of a red suitcase. The person is wearing a black wristband and dark pants. The background shows a train track curving through a lush green landscape under bright sunlight.

Traveling Light

The Thing About Light

The thing about light
Is that it really isn't yours.

It's what you gather
And shine back.

And it gets more power
From reflectiveness.

If you sit still and take it in,
It fills your cup,
And then you can give it off yourself.

--Anne Lamott
from *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*

2017 Lent Devotional

By members of Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church

Traveling Light

2017 Lent Devotional

**Hennepin Avenue
United Methodist Church**
511 Groveland Avenue | Minneapolis, MN 55403

Traveling Light

Lent 2017 at Hennepin

"Consider the lilies...do not worry about tomorrow...ask, seek, knock...blessed are you...where your treasure is there your heart will be also..."

These are some of the words of Jesus to us as we enter into the season of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday, March 1st. As we walk these sacred days together, some will choose to take on a spiritual practice to mark the days. Others will choose to give up something as a reminder that these days are set aside for remembering what it means to be God's people called to live in the Way of Jesus.

We are making the Lenten road by walking it. Our invitation and our theme for these 40 days is "Traveling Light." This theme really has double meaning. It reflects a desire to let go, unburden, to simplify so we might be more present to God. How can we be nimble enough to make this journey? What do we need to set down, let go of to unburden ourselves from baggage that keeps us from following God's call in our lives? How can we lighten our load?

And it asks us to look for where the light is that guides our journey. What lights the way for our road-making? Who are the people who reflect God's light in our life? How are we light to one another?

This devotional is meant to be a companion for your journey. It is filled with reflections, poems and prayers submitted by Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church members. There is also a Scripture reading for each day from the Common Lectionary and from Brian McLaren's *We Make the Road By Walking*. Our prayer is that this Lenten season will be rich and that its invitation is to deepen your faith life in a way that compels each of us to help transform and heal the world.

May these 40 days find us all "Traveling Light."

Kent Peterson

Jolene Roehlkepartain

Sally Johnson

Lenten Calendar 2017

WEDNESDAYS IN LENT

LABYRINTH PRAYER WALKS

10am-9pm in the Art Gallery

Beginning March 1st, we will offer various labyrinths for prayer. Many days will contain live music to accompany the prayer walks.

LIVING THE QUESTIONS 2.0

6:30-7:30pm in Room 203

Living the Questions 2.0 is a DVD-based, interactive study featuring prominent theologians from around the world.

You can attend one or all!

LYFE GROUP

6-7:15pm in the Longfellow Room

Lenten LYFE Group will study the book, *We Make the Road by Walking*, by Brian McLaren as they form a community of people who study and pray together. Steve Cope will be the leader/host. Books are available at the church office or online.

U.S. NAVY SEA CHANTERS | MARCH 12

2pm in the Sanctuary

CHILDREN'S SABBATH | MARCH 19

10am in the Sanctuary

The Altar Choir will be performing a musical.

PASSION CONCERT | APRIL 9

12pm in the Sanctuary

Holy Week

MAUNDY THURSDAY | APRIL 13

7pm in the Art Gallery*

GOOD FRIDAY TENEBRAE | APRIL 14

NOON in the Border Chapel

7pm in the Sanctuary*

EASTER SUNDAY | APRIL 16

7am Sunrise Service in Art Gallery

8am Pancake Breakfast in the Social Hall

9am & 11am in the Sanctuary*

*nursery care available

On Easter Sunday, everyone is encouraged to use the parking ramp at the Walker Art Center. Keep your car safe and warm, and help free up space in our parking lot for other guests, members and visitors. Be sure to get your voucher for free parking from an usher or at the reception desk before you go back. Also, remember there are about 50 spaces available to us at the Architectural Alliance parking lot (400 Clifton Ave). See our website or pick up a handy map at the reception desk!

ASH WEDNESDAY

God, Be Our Way

Lord Jesus,
desert dweller,
help us now,
at this time of Lent,
to accompany you.

If we have grown soft,
cushioning our lives
with excuses,
expose us to the toughness
of your way.

If we have grown lazy,
cushioning our minds
with easy, thin thoughts,
expose us to the rigour
of your truth.

If we have grown comfortable,
cushioning our living
with satisfaction and success,
expose us to the challenge
of your life.

As we walk,
God, be our way.
As we learn,
God, be our truth.
As we grow,
God, be our life.

--John Harvey

**As we enter the season of Lent on this Ash Wednesday,
be our way, be our truth, be our life. Amen**

What Feeds Us

Bill Mathis

Anybody here think they're not busy enough? These days, it seems if any of us have a free evening in their schedule, we want to fill it by joining something new or volunteering for one more thing – sports, clubs, study groups, family, social life – all good investments of our time and energy.

As someone who counts on people being able to make a regular commitment and stick with it, I don't think it's a bad thing to find something that is healthy, healing, uplifting, and contributory. In fact, in most of the groups with whom I spend time, people feel what we're doing together is an activity which both feeds and utilizes their soul-gifts. And of course, those are proper goals for events and activities at church!

The problem comes when one of two things happens. Either we are simply so over-committed that we're not able to live up to the requirements of the activity; or we spend so much time in such activities that we're not able to process life, events, new information, strong feelings, or other things arising from our participation. Are we just too busy?

As we look at traveling light for these next few weeks, let's take a little time to evaluate whether the things to which we're giving our lives both feed us and use us to feed others. And if the answer is "no," consider what would serve better, as we're called to be both disciples and ministers in Jesus' name.

**O God, help us to slow down and reflect on our lives.
May we live lives that feed our souls—and others. Amen**

The Ritual of Turning on Lights

Lorelei Larson

I like ritual. Each morning as I awaken I pray, "This is the day that You have given me. I receive it with joy and gratitude."

Next, I say, "I step into my life," as I slide one foot into a slipper. Then I say, "I step into the day," sliding my other foot into the remaining slipper. Now, as I am ready to walk into my waking state, I say, "and into the mystery." This opens me to expectation and anticipation of God's blessings for me into the day of unknowns.

Then I incorporate wisdom from a tea bag tag that I saved from years ago as I turn on each light in the living room. At the first one I pray, "Let there be light." This represents a prayer to be open to enlightenment.

As I walk to the next light, I say, "I travel light." This, to me, is an affirmation to remember to carry a lightness of spirit into my day and/or a letting go of a heaviness regarding some past issue. It also might be an awareness to let go of some tangible things I no longer use or need that can be shared.

Walking to the next lamp, I affirm, "I live light." I see this affirmation as a prayer to carry a lightness of heart as I go about my life for that day.

Next lamp, I pray and affirm, "I spread the light," to remember to carry a spirit of love and compassion for others throughout the day. At this lamp I have a photo gallery of members of my larger family. I remember each one in prayers for blessings, safety and health, and/or specific needs.

As I leave this practice of ritual, I say, "I am the light." Jesus said "I am who I am." The words "I am" are powerful. They help me to remember the light of God within me as I go about my life that day.

I look forward to this ritual as I awaken. It gives me a good start and focus in my day. It brings me to a positive attitude, awareness and comfort that the Spirit of God is around me and with me throughout the day that I have been given.

Loving God, give me grace this day to create a space in which your presence moves. Help me to step into this day with hope and promise of your companionship. Amen

Packing for the Road Ahead

Steve Blons

(inspired by a list I use before every trip to ensure I take only the essentials)

- A staff for balance
- Good shoes
- An umbrella
- Pen and paper
- Dear ones nearby
- Some poetry; some music
- Some silence; some conversation
- Laughter and play
- Dancing and touching
- Color and beauty
- Wind and rain
- Fire for warmth and light
- The wine of curiosity
- The bread of gratitude

For each breath taken and given
Taken and given

Loving Spirit, may I have all I need this day to travel life's path with you. In all I do, help me to open myself to the ways of peace and prayer so I come to day's end at rest in your presence. Amen

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

A Spiritual Traveler Travels Light

Kris Sopoci

A Spiritual Traveler — A traveler who seeks the inner, spiritual core of religious experience and follows the Light of God throughout the journey.

Become a Spiritual Traveler as a way back to yourself. Set your self free; stop thinking about it all. Leave behind your physical, emotional, and behavioral baggage. Rise-up and temporarily shed the identity that has been placed upon you by others and your physical body. Become free to discover who you are truly created to become. May your journey be glorious and your effort rewarded.

Travel guidelines:

Love God. This is the first commandment and contains the entire journey—which is Love God with all your heart and soul.

Be a Citizen of the Universe. Learn to share this planet with all the many life forms. To hurt another is to hurt self; we all are connected in spirit and created by one God.

Align With God. In every action and thought, take the high road and make each moment an expression of the Divine.

Love Another. Mature travelers know the difference between helping and hurting; their hearts will not let them intentionally cause harm.

Live Fully. Each traveler is a multi-level being with an assortment of feelings, thoughts, desires, and dreams.

Seek Excellence. In every action and thought, do your best to merge individual and higher need.

Be Yourself. Do not let others keep you from finding and expressing who you are.

Help Others.

Do Good Deeds. We are born with an inner awareness of what is right.

Gratitude. Thank God for all that you have been given as you travel.

Pray. Communicate and speak with God through ongoing conversation.

Travel Beyond Teachings. Have your own experience. Knowledge is different than teachings.

There is one thing in this world that must never be forgotten. You have come into this world for a particular task, and that is your purpose; if you do not perform it, then you will have done nothing.

--Rumi

Adapted from Dr. Stewart Bitkoff, spiritual traveler, poet, author, a student of Sufi Mysticism and the perennial philosophy. Professionally specializing in the healing applications of therapeutic recreation, psychiatric rehabilitation and mental health treatment; he holds a doctorate in education and served on the faculties of multiple colleges and universities.

God of Light, may I follow you this day to all the places of beauty and terror. May I see your image in all I meet and may I give light to the world with my very life. Amen

Ancient Words

Ingrid Bloom

As we begin our Lenten walk I thought of Michael Smith's song, "Ancient Words":

*Ancient words, long preserved, for our walk in this world
they resound with Gods own heart
O let the ancient words impart... words of life... words of hope
Give us strength, help us cope, in this world where we would roam
Ancient words will guide us home.*

So I asked myself what are those ancient words? Can they be extracted from the following words and acts of Jesus:

Jesus healed the lame, the mentally ill, the ones who were outcasts. He lifted up the children who were not to be seen or heard,

and the women who were of no consequence and had no rights.

He lifted up ethnic groups that were shunned or looked down upon.

Jesus lifted up the disabled and returned them to meaningful work in their community.

He lifted up those who were poor, and helped them find their dignity and worth.

Let your hearts go out to the hungry, and feed them.

Jesus declared and lived unwavering love for God. He gave of himself totally.

He desired relationships that are stable and meaningful.

Jesus demonstrated self-discipline, faith, wisdom and purity of heart.

True holiness is to give up power. He said give up resentments and grudges.

Forgive seventy-times-seven. Do not judge others. Ask more questions, ponder more.

Jesus held people accountable. He called out injustice.

Do not take revenge for insults and cruelty. Do not seek punishment. Seek transformation.

Hope for repentance and spiritual awakening. Do not react with anger but with faith in God.

Rise above the pettiness, the ignorance, pride, vengeance, and hate. Pray the Lord's Prayer.

Lead where God's love can transform everything.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit (John 15:5).

What ancient words or deeds of Jesus are guiding you?

Ancient words, guide me home to the presence of God. Amen

There Have Been Days

Nate Melcher

There have been days I need to carry a full backpack. Laptop, multiple cables and adapters, a book, and a pad of paper. Spare pair of socks.

There have been days when I need to carry just a cell phone. Apps to jot down notes, send a quick message, look up an important detail. Spare battery charger.

There have been days when I need to carry nothing. Ears to listen, mouth to speak, hands to work, and feet to walk the path. Wristwatch optional.

There have been days when I needed that full backpack and forgot it. There have been days when I needed that cell phone and forgot it. Sometimes, it's a burden. Other times, it's freeing.

There is one thing that links all of those things I carry: they are tools. I don't believe we are addicted to phones, but we can get addicted to a certain way of using them. I don't believe living unplugged is automatically living simply, but we can let the plug trip us up if we use it in certain ways. It is the same with any technology and tools: cars, silverware, lighting, money, pencils. It is the same with I choose to speak with my mouth, whether I offer an open hand or a closed fist, whether I keep my eyes and ears open or turn away.

There have been days that, whether I have a full backpack, something in my cell phone holster, or just my wits about me, I also remember God walks with me.

There is one thing that links all of those days: they are less burdensome.

**God, walk with me as I travel through my day
and help me to pay attention to the essential tools
that help me do your work. Amen**

The Inner Journey

Kent Peterson

I have lived a deeply privileged life.

I've spent a year studying in the Middle East, two summers living in Central America, and overall, traveled to forty-something states and forty-something countries.

And yet, now in midlife, I find the most rewarding travel to be my inner journey. I've learned that what I desire most is right here. Within. In my spirit. At my center.

Through the use of a variety of practices—including meditation, centering prayer, breath work, and walking the labyrinth—I've discovered that I am infinitely more than the mental constructions that I create and that possess me every day.

By simply observing all the “mind stuff”: the abstractions, the thoughts, the fears, the false beliefs—allowing them to be, and not judging them—I've found that they gradually dissipate and lose their weight and power. Just by being present with them, I can move past all of the wounds, the hurts, the scars, and the longings that my mind has compulsively filled up the space with and reach my core, my Essence, my Source.

It takes a willingness to stay—to remain present with and embrace whatever I am experiencing. It takes an openness and an attitude of lovingkindness toward myself—as I sit silently in my chair, or observe my breath, or take step after step following the contours of the labyrinth.

But gradually, over time, I find my aliveness. I slowly awaken to my Ground of Being—the One who moves within and among us, and in whom we rest.

God, guide my passage as I open to the richness within. Amen

Listen to the Directions

Dwight Haberman

Come to me all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Put on my yoke and learn from me. I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. My yoke is easy to bear and my burden is light.

--Matthew 11

As I pondered our Lenten theme, I was struck with the fact that it is a positive, affirming theme. That seems appropriate to me. It occurred to me that we have been told time and again to travel lightly. It is just that we don't "follow the directions" very well.

We know that a "heavy heart" is more than emotions. It can be physical because of our lifestyle. We are cautioned about the many effects of the stress that comes from not traveling lightly. Some effects come from our own choices or unforeseen circumstances. Some come from the requests that others make of us. The secular writer Tom Friedman, from the New York Times and St. Louis Park, has recently written a book entitled, *Thank You for Being Late*, in which he deals with our too-busy lives. It is not something we do not know.

Jesus calls us to travel lightly and gives us guidance, and Lent is a good time to "listen to the directions," mostly from his example. He goes off by himself to pray, to listen, to be silent. On more than one occasion he is asked to go and minister to human need, but he does not rush to help—knowing that in those cases God will be served at the appropriate time. Even when the call of God is for the "heavy duty," they are more manageable because, in the love of God, they can be easier to handle.

Can we learn to do a better job of traveling lightly this Lenten season? Can we follow this admonition of the writer to the Hebrews?

Therefore, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

--Hebrews 12:1-2

**I lay down my heavy loads this day, Holy One,
following the lead of Jesus. Amen**

The Sage Must Travel Light

Submitted by Cheryl Hauser

Youth can carry a heavy load day after day after day
without noticing the damaging effects.
But the sage must lay down the burden.
 Resentments, regrets,
 injuries, slights,
 grudges, and disappointments
 are much too cumbersome
for a person of wisdom and contentment.
 The sage must travel light.

 There is a backpack in the mind
 which over the years has become
 filled with rocks and stones.
You do not have to carry them anymore.
 You can empty your pack
 and carry only compassion
 from one day to the next.

 --from the Sage's *Tao Te Ching*:
 Ancient Advice for the Second Half of Life

**Traveling God, may I lay down all that would hinder me
from being your messenger of light and love to all I meet this day.
Amen**

Let it Go

Evelyn Anderson

OK, I could give up chocolate for Lent—or maybe coffee. Either would be a sacrifice for me! But it should be something more meaningful, don't you think?

This Lent, I am giving up WORRY. When life gets especially stressful, I awaken during the night reliving and rethinking yesterday or worrying about what's ahead for tomorrow. Sometimes both.

In the HAUMC Bible Study group, we are studying the book of Matthew. When we came to Matthew 6, the familiar words of Jesus struck home:

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or What shall we drink... for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Worry, I think, reflects the selfish belief that we are in control of everything. Even my precocious three-year-old granddaughter sings and dances to the theme from Frozen: "Let it go, let it go." When life's problems seemed overwhelming, my very wise mother used to say, "Let go and let God." Through the Holy Spirit, she found the help she needed.

My anti-worry plan for Lent is to recite the Serenity Prayer each night, to remind myself that I am not in control and that I can truly "let God." Ask me after Easter how I am sleeping!

**God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen**

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

A Blessing for Those Who Carry Much

Sally Johnson

For those who wake in the night
with an unnamed, sharp-toothed nagging
that cannot be assuaged with
fitful logic or persistent prayer.

For the one who is lost
to whatever they once knew to be true
about who they are and what they hoped for
and what the world
now seems to be.

For the mother whose worries
will be confirmed
And the father whose love
seems useless
In the face of a child hell-bent
on destruction.

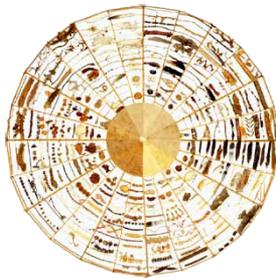
For those whose pain is real
and deep and never-ending
And all those whose compassion
Is faithful and fierce.

For the ones who see dreams
slip through their fingers
And possibility become a shadow
that rarely sees light.

For the children who try
and nearly always fail
And those who strive desperately
to find ways to guide them, to lift them,
to help them succeed.

For those who want only a little
And those who take more than they need.
And for those whose hearts break
For every empty hand and every back bent
by the weight of an unkind world.

God, in your mercy, bless these
Your children, whose lives reflect
your image.
Companion them.
Light their way as they travel
This life
Full of beauty and blessing
So often just outside our reach.



**Sometimes our prayers go deeper than words, God.
Engage us in your life-giving breath and let us rest in your silence,
so even when words are scarce, we know you are there.
Amen**

Living with Eagles

Kathleen Chesney

As I swept the kitchen floor on a recent February morning, action outside the windows caught my attention. We live on a small private lake and two bald eagles stood on its icy surface, their feathers fluttering in the breeze.

One eagle appeared to be feeding on a rabbit carcass. Behind it the second bird watched, perhaps waiting for leftovers. I saw the bright white heads and yellow beaks in the sunshine, but beyond their brown bodies, their white tails blended in with the snow-covered ice.

Occasionally when I view such a sight it seems like I'm transported into nature. I become a participant. That morning my spirit flew out the window and I became a third eagle hungrily watching the first one consume its feast. I've come to the conclusion this is divine interconnection.

Later that day an eagle again caught my eye. It flew low over the lake, maneuvering like a graceful barnstorming airplane. It speedily danced on the breeze, pirouetting, diving and swooping back up.

Was the eagle hunting or showing off for a mate, I wondered later? Bob Janssen calls such behavior eagle play. Whatever its intention, I flew with it for sheer joy.

**I soar in the glory of all creation, Holy One.
And I soar in my awareness of how interconnected I am
with all life forms—and with you. Amen**

Each Day

At the beginning of each day,
after we open our eyes
to receive the light
of that day,

As we listen to the voices
and sounds
that surround us,

We must resolve to treat each hour
as the rarest of gifts,
and be grateful
for the consciousness
that allows us to experience it,
recalling in thanks
that our awareness is a present
from we know not where,
or how, or why.

When we rise from sleep let us rise for the joy
of the true Work that we will be about
this day,
and considerately cheer one another on.

Life will always provide matters for concern.
Each day, however, brings with it reasons for joy.

Every day carries the potential
to bring the experience of heaven;
have courage to expect good from it.

Be gentle with this life,
and use the light of life
to live fully in your time.

--John McQuiston II,
Always We Begin Again: The Benedictine Way of Living

**God, guide me to see the sacredness in each hour,
each encounter, each experience. Amen**

The Path of Illumination

Jolene Roehlkepartain

I love moonlit walks, especially when a full moon brightens the way, and stars glisten in the sky. When I was a child, stories of the Underground Railroad mesmerized me, and I wondered what it was like to follow the path of the moon's light. I admired how people created secret safe houses and helped people escape during that long, dark time in our history.

Each one of us is a light, and what we do with that light—matters.

How do we spread our light? By our actions. By our words. By our presence. Recently, a friend sent me a note that said, “I’m so glad you’re on the planet. Your life gives me great hope.”

During dark times, it’s tempting to hide our light, to protect it from being extinguished. We need to guard our souls during difficulties, but we also need to take the risk to shine, to spread light in the darkness.

Sometime it may appear that our individual lights are small and that they so easily flicker. When we gather together and share our lights, the glow spreads and builds. A great light forms from the symphony created by the chorus of our lights.

“People are like stained-glass windows,” says Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, one of my favorite writers. “They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.”

May our inner lights continue to glow—and grow.

**O God, I'm going to let my light shine—
until it joins with all the other lights around me
and your Kingdom is revealed on Earth. Amen**

Extra Baggage

Curt Oliver

The advent of Lent is a good time to contemplate our extra baggage. I think of all the things, or “stuff,” that I already have or am tempted to acquire. The word “covet” comes to mind, and I think of the tenth commandment: *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s* (Exodus 20:17). We had to memorize that in Sunday school years ago, and yes, we always giggled about the ass thing.

I confess to looking longingly at houses bigger and fancier than mine. As a gay man, I think I’m off the hook about my neighbor’s wife, and I don’t know anyone who has a manservant or a maidservant. We can possibly update ox and ass to “BMW” and “Jaguar.” But then we have “anything that is thy neighbor’s,” and that covers a lot of ground.

We’re constantly teased and tempted by commercials and advertisements to buy more and more stuff. Someone wiser than I has suggested that there are two stages in life: the time to acquire things and the time to give things away, and the sooner we come to the second stage, the better.

What do I really need that I do not already have? What do I have that I really don’t need?

*There once was a fellow named “me,”
who coveted all I could see.
Till I looked all around,
saw my blessings abound.
From coveting, Lord, set me free!*

**Move through all the words that wash over me this day, O God.
Give me the desire for the simplicity that calls to my heart
and fills me with joy. Amen**

SAINT PATRICK'S DAY

For Courage

When the light around you lessens
And your thoughts darken until
Your body feels fear turn
Cold as a stone inside

When you find yourself bereft
Of any belief in yourself
And all you unknowingly
Leaned on has fallen

When one voice commands
Your whole heart,
And it is raven dark,

Steady yourself and see
That it is your own thinking
That darkens your world

Search and you will find
A diamond-thought of light,

Know that you are not alone
And that this darkness has purpose
Gradually it will school your eyes
To find the one gift
your life requires
Hidden within this night-corner.

Invoke the learning
Of every suffering
You have suffered.

Close your eyes
Gather all the kindling
About your heart
To create one spark.
That is all you need
To nourish the flame
That will cleanse the dark
Of its weight of festered fear.

A new confidence will come alive
To urge you towards higher ground
Where your imagination
Will learn to engage difficulty
As its most rewarding threshold!

--John O'Donohue

**Give me courage, O God, to find higher ground
when I feel discouraged or afraid.**

Expand my imagination to see a new way to travel lightly. Amen

Go and Visit

Jim McChesney

One of the roads we all walk is paying bills.

A few years ago, a group of friends was having a debate about whether it is better to pay bills when they arrive in the mail, or pay them at the last day. Some argued that they wanted to keep their money as long as possible. Others argued that they wanted to pay soon and not have any worry about getting it paid in time. The second group argued that they found confidence paying soon and did not lose any sleep over the bills. The group was divided, but no one changed to the other side on the issue, holding on to their longtime habits.

Surprise: electronic banking allows one to have their bills paid on the day a bill is due or their day before it is due. Wow. Imagine that, no worry, and a postage stamp saved as well. Not everyone is ready for this shift, but it is available and growing in practice.

So, in Lent 2017, maybe more of us can shift our thinking about Lent, not as a time to give up something, but a holy time to add a simple, loving practice: visiting a shut-in. What if many of us would go and visit at least one shut-in during Lent? Or even one per week for these six weeks?

Maybe you have wondered about someone that you have missed recently, and their name came up recently—a glimpse of an old friend? Maybe you heard of someone who has suffered a loss or has been recovering from an illness. We might even had a thought like, "I should go by and visit them."

Lent is a great time to go and visit. Let's do it. I am confident that you and I will be enriched by every visit we share. For me, this is one of the most wonderful types of spiritual road-making. Like setting up a new bill paying system, we can all be enriched, on time, by putting some visits with shut-ins as part of our Lent this year.

**O God, use us to be the carriers of your blessing
to those who are lonely or shut in. Amen**

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Making Space

Elizabeth Bennett

How do you “lighten your load” when you're halfway through your first pregnancy? Never mind all of the stuff that the Baby Industrial Complex says I must buy immediately; “light” is simply not at all how I'm feeling in my own body.

As I thought about “traveling light” though, my yoga practice came to mind. I practice a particular style of yoga that has a reputation for being very rigid and strict. There's a lot of bending forward to touch your hands to the floor or your feet. In a lot of these poses, your feet are supposed to be together. A few weeks ago, my teacher told me I needed to start separating my feet to give myself space for my belly when I bend forward. This minor change made a huge difference!

So perhaps instead of thinking of “lightness” this Lent, I will think about “making space.” There are so many ways to give yourself space. You can widen your stance, unclench your jaw, let yourself relax a little. You can let go (at least a little bit, sometimes) of perfectionism and comparing yourself to others, and give yourself permission to see what happens. You can take a walk, sing a song, lovingly prepare a nourishing meal. You can make space in your day to say something kind to someone obnoxious. I pray that as I work to give myself more space, I'll become better at making space for all of the children of God I encounter.



**Holy Mother and Father, instill in me
the commitment this Lenten season to make more space
for kindness, joy, simplicity, grace, and love. Amen**

FIRST DAY OF SPRING

All the Hemispheres

Leave the familiar for a while.
Let your senses and bodies stretch out
Like a welcomed season
Onto the meadow and shores and hills.
Open up to the Roof.
Make a new watermark on your excitement
And love.
Like a blooming night flower,
Bestow your vital fragrance of happiness
And giving
Upon our intimate assembly.
Change rooms in your mind for a day.
All the hemispheres in existence
Lie beside an equator
In your heart.
Greet Yourself
In your thousand other forms
As you mount the hidden tide and travel
Back home.
All the hemispheres in heaven
Are sitting around a fire
Chatting
While stitching themselves together
Into the Great Circle inside of
You.

--Hafiz

**On this first day of Spring, guide my steps so that I can begin again
and welcome a new spiritual season within me. Amen**

Supporting God's Work in the World

Susan Dunlop

Luke 18: 22–25.

We are keenly aware that we live in the richest, most powerful country in the world. Compared to a village India for instance, the most common among us live like kings and queens. “Traveling Light” to me means adopting a lifestyle that trims our consumption and refocuses us on the common good. And even if we were to do this, we would still live very high on the “food chain.”

What would traveling lightly and living simply look like? It would mean having time and means to support God's work in world. It would mean that our heart's desire is to make life better and happier for others. We would adopt fewer polluting lifestyle activities, living simply, and embracing causes that benefit the less fortunate.

I have observed that those who travel light have happy, open, loving spirits that enfold and comfort others. I know that during their lives and after through their charitable giving, they support endeavors that are making transformative differences and that they leave behind profound legacies to follow and admire.

“Traveling Light” also brings a sense of peace with one's life goals. Traveling light expands the time and resources available to work for a healthy future, to provide a legacy of caring and love, and to follow in the steps of those who “Traveled Light” before us and influenced us to follow in their path.

**Holy One, you call us to be light in the world
and to care for the least, the lost and those on the margins.
Help us to see the gifts we have to offer
and fill us with gratitude for being able to offer them. Amen**

Grand Light in the Grand Canyon

Chuck Dayton

These walls were formed from holy light.
when beings that learned to eat the sun,
drifted beneath the ancient seas.

A swath of dawn across the north rim,
oozes across the textured face, waking
redwarm rock from gray sleep.

Our silver craft dances chocolate rapids,
slipping down this vault of time.
thru shadowy millennium silence.

Afternoon reflector oven, shines
a glow to the shady side like
a candle cupped behind a hand.

Ascending shadow sweeps twilight
over the south rim, and Anasazi spirits
flit like bats, black against the indigo lid.

Bagged sleepers on the sand, might see
the upstream V of the canyon capture
the crescent and two blazing planets.

The cobalt slit of sky rolls eastward. Orion
floats above the rim, reminding us
We too are light, the stuff of stars.

**Creator God, awaken me to the wonder that is all around.
Give me eyes to see and ears to hear your creative artistry in
the smallest of creatures and the majesty of mountains.
In awe, Amen.**

A Better Trip

Donna Long

The first thing you need to do when traveling light is to ditch all unnecessary baggage. I would suggest you get out two imaginary suitcases and into one pack all the shame you are carrying around and into the other pack whatever guilt you have accumulated. Leave them behind for God to deal with. You could leave a few extra things for God to pick up as well such as old wounds, hurts and grudges that are weighing you down. You will be so much freer and lighter if you don't have to carry all this baggage wherever you go.

After you have done that you need to pray that you will be enveloped in God's light so that you can be a beacon of hope for all the people you meet in your travels.

You don't need a ticket or a passport to travel to where you are needed most. You are needed most right where you are. You can travel through your daily life loving and being authentic with all the people you see daily. You don't have to say anything because your light will shine through all your actions and deeds. You will start seeing people and places in a whole new way—and as you love the people in your daily life in a whole new way, you will also start loving yourself in a whole new way too.

What could be a better trip than that?

Giver of Life, help me to set aside and relinquish my burdens. Thank you that you are willing to bear the weight of all the unnecessary baggage that I grow weary of carrying. Amen

The Real Work

Submitted by Mary Honstead

It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work,

and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

--Wendell Berry

**Be present with us, O God, at the junctions of our lives—
when the path is not straight,
when our choices seem blocked,
when confusion overwhelms certainty.
May we open to our questions,
and may your light shine through our unknowing. Amen**

Overpacking

Kathleen McDowell

The heart is the one true mind.

--Ned Ashton

When I pack for a trip, I try to be as minimalist as I can. I used to pack more than I needed, just in case—stuff that didn't add to the quality of my trip—and I created a more cumbersome bag to carry from place to place. A common theme for me. Then I would return with about one-third of my stuff unused. How often do we overpack our brains with ponderings and things that just take up space?

Our spiritual teacher talked about how our brain is an offshoot of our heart during fetal development. So when we load up on judgments, blame, shame, guilt, and excuses, does it take up space we can use for acceptance, compassion, mercy, grace, kindness, altruism and love? When we package these in our heads, how often is it really heart-based? If we ask ourselves, how does this sit with our hearts? Does it align with who we really want to be? Or does it trigger fear, lack, resentments, and hostility?

Maybe this Lenten season we can let go of the parts of us that do not add to our quality of life. We can ask, what if I was going through a challenging time, how I would want someone to reach out to me, treat me? What if we take the time to stop our judgmental mind long enough to learn more about the backstory to create a bridge of hearts?

Since we are all created in the image of God, why not look at us that way? We all get the opportunity to learn from our choices and to make different ones. Some people experience too much pain and struggle to move forward. In the Bible, Jesus asks us to reach out to offer kindness and compassion. Extending kindness and compassion also includes offering it to our own hearts.

**Holy God, during this Lenten season,
may I let go of all that separates me from my True Self,
from my own heart, and from you. Amen**

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

You Can Fly Marcia Brinkley

Being human means carrying a lot of stuff—worries, concerns, disappointments, unfulfilled expectations—and much more. At times, these burdens take their toll on us and leave us struggling to maintain or regain our health and wholeness.

So how DO we move through our days with these heavy loads weighing us down? Where are those glimpses of hope for us? I often find inspiration in the beautiful words that come from our poets and song writers, who are, perhaps, our modern prophets.

I want to share this lovely song by Mary Chapin Carpenter, released in 1994, but still relevant today. Her words create for me an image of what it could be like if we could learn to let go of some of that weight and allow ourselves to be light enough to fly.



Why Walk When You Can Fly

In this world there's a whole lot of trouble, baby

In this world there's a whole lot of pain

In this world there's a whole lot of trouble

But a whole lot of ground to gain

Why take when you could be giving, why watch as the world goes by

It's a hard enough life to be living, why walk when you can fly

In this world there's a whole lot of sorrow

In this world there's a whole lot of shame

In this world there's a whole lot of sorrow

And a whole lotta ground to gain

When you spend your whole life wishing, wanting and wondering why

It's a long enough life to be living, why walk when you can fly

And in this world there's a whole lot of golden

In this world there's a whole lot of pain

In this world you've a soul for a compass

And a heart for a pair of wings

There's a star on the far horizon, rising bright in an azure sky

For the rest of the time that you're given, why walk when you can fly

**May I lighten my load
so that my road rises to the sky, Holy One.
May I glide freely on this sacred path,
unburdened of all that weighs me down. Amen**

Finding Your Way

If light is in your heart, you will find your way home.

--Rumi

God, kindle the light in my heart and keep it burning. Amen

Taking the Plunge

Kimm Schneider

Traveling lightly. I don't always. I fret more about what I need to bring than about the actual trip. I want to be prepared. I don't want to admit that maybe, just maybe, it's a control thing. When birds migrate, they don't take a thing with them. They stop when hungry, rest when tired, and do their best to avoid tall buildings or animals of prey. God takes care of them. I reassure myself that there are stores where I can purchase whatever I may have forgotten. Still, I have packed too many shoes.

For my recent "Polar Plunge" for Camp Chill, I debated less with myself about actually making the jump than thinking about the clothes I would need and knowing how I would get warm when I emerged from the deep freeze. God had nudged me to do this. I'd bitten the bullet, made the commitment to jump and I could do it. I would not second guess my decision. I was ready. . . except for what would go in my bag. What clothes would be the most suitable for jumping? Oh! A hairdryer – frozen hair would not be pleasant. And what clothes to put on afterwards if I was not completely dry? You know how clothes can stick to a damp body? I wanted to be sure they would just slide over my legs and arms. And oh my – I nearly forgot a towel.

Since childhood I've been told, heard the words and said them to others, "everything will be alright." "It will turn out fine." "Where's your faith?" But still I can battle with myself about the packing, the getting ready, and being prepared. I need to trust the organizers, my community, my family and friends. I don't have to think about everything myself. They will help with the preparations. If I've forgotten something, I can borrow it. There was a warm tent, towels to use, a campfire and firemen to save me from real peril. All I had to do was jump.

Hennepin Church is embarking on a large capital campaign. I've left the real planning, discerning and organizing to the experts. It is only my job to take the plunge and commit to what God is nudging me to do. I will share my love for this great church, its great saints, the community of believers and what it has meant to me the past 30 years.

**I place my trust in you, Holy One, as I plunge into the future.
Amen**

The Lighter the Load, the More Joyful the Journey

Bob Brinkley

The word “dualism” is showing up more and more in spiritual literature and from several spiritual traditions. Dual-ism is the ism of our culture, the only reality. It sets humans against one another, against Nature. It sees God as separate and apart from us, and who is in some far-off heaven. We then see a “God” who judges some and rewards others. Dualism sets up a dichotomy between good and bad, a division of the human family into races, a division of the wealthy and the poor, business and labor, of government and the governed. Dualism is the separation of soul and body, man and woman, young and old, religion and science, heaven and earth. This ism is the god most worshiped by our western culture, the sickness of our time. A heavy, heavy load that weighs down one’s spirit.

Jesus, light years ahead of his time, taught and lived a radically different reality. He spoke of a Oneness with the Source of his being. The prayer of his life was for our oneness with God and with God’s body of creation (John 17:20-23). Jesus was about lifting burdensome, spirit-killing loads from off of us, lightening our loads, bearing with you and me the crushing weight of a culture’s expectations that creates so much dis-ease and suffering.

Listen to Jesus (Matthew 11:28-30): *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

In those days it was common to see that not one, but two oxen pulled a cart. The two were yoked together, making the load much, much lighter. This is an image of community pulling together, bearing one another’s burdens. It’s a picture of the Kingdom of God, here and now, around us and within us.

**Holy One, strengthen us to be your beloved community
as we seek to faithfully build your Kingdom. Amen**

Caring for Your Fellow Travelers

Phyllis Krull

What does it mean to travel light? In my twenties, thirties, and forties, I threw an extra pair of jeans and a sweatshirt in my travel bag along with a toothbrush and a few aspirin while heading off to places I'd like to visit.

In my fifties and onward, I packed for warm and cold weather, took a pill case marked "Sunday through Saturday," which held my blood pressure pills, Lipitor and nighttime Tylenol. I often took my own bed pillow plus cozy P.J.s and slippers. Carrying many more "comfort items" and medications, I somehow became more aware of others who crossed my path.

Traveling light or with lots of comfort items, I've always tried to notice others who were traveling the same roads. When someone appeared hungry, I offered to share, stopped to smile and chat with those who seemed lonely, offered to assist those who appeared lost (though I'm not so good at directions), and cried with someone who was grieving.

Was it through my knowledge of the Bible that I tried to become more like Jesus? He healed the sick, comforted the lonely and fed the hungry. Jesus traveled light. My parents always said, "Do the right thing," indicating that I should think about what Jesus would do in a particular situation. With Jesus as a guide and counselor, I really don't think it matters whether you travel light or bring lots of bags—as long as you remember to treat others as you would want to be treated. That is, care for your fellow traveler as you would want to be cared for!!!

**As I travel life's path, may I recognize the needs of those
around me, O God, and follow Jesus' example
of bringing aid, comfort, and hope. Amen**

Doing What's Important

I awoke to the confusion of a new day.
The scraps of dreams, memories of yesterday, and new
cravings creeping into awareness,
The sun spilling its light over all but the shadows and a
cacophony of sound
From outside and in.
What to make order of? What to let go?
And who makes the choice?
I think I will go down to the river and just watch it flow,
It's been a long time since I have done something really
important.

--David Sluyter,
from *Prayers for a Thousand Years*

**God, instead of me getting caught up in the raging current,
help me to slow down and find still waters. Amen**

APRIL FOOL'S DAY

Seriously, . . .
Steve Blons

I want to say a word on behalf of laughter and play in its many forms: jokes, puns, silliness, ironies, foibles, malaprops and all the rest.

I know we live in serious times, confronted with serious problems, but I hope we are still able to see folly and laugh at it. Especially our own. My granddaughter pointed out recently that I laugh a lot, “mostly at your own stuff.” Guilty. The older I get, the more often I crack myself up. I just seem to do and say funny things. Like locking my keys in the car with the engine running. Or opening the cupboard to put away the ice cream.

Now while it is risky to laugh when someone else does these things, I think it's not only OK but essential to be able to laugh at ourselves. Like when I thought I heard someone say, “We'd like to welcome all the cucumbers here.” (Newcomers?) I love it when I “hear” funny. Between memory slippage and hearing problems, marital conversations can be hysterical (well, at least to me).

My point is this: travel light, not (always) serious.
Watch for the odd and the quirky.
Rejoice in your own foolishness.
There will be plenty of real drama,
but don't forget to make room for the humor.

I leave you with this photo I took at the entrance
to a monastery we recently visited.
I hope it makes you smile too.



**God, help us to find the humor and silliness
on this April Fools' Day. Amen**

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Time for Pilgrimage

Betsy Barnum

I used to give talks and lead study circles on voluntary simplicity. More recently, living with less—traveling light—has come to be called “minimalism.” I am encountering it everywhere I turn these days. I find deeply appealing the idea of reducing the number of things in my life to only those I know, want and love—so each thing, as Marie Kondo puts it in her popular book, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, brings me a spark of joy.

This yearning to lighten my load grows as I get older. I remember reading of four stages of life described in one of the Eastern traditions. I can't remember the first three, but the fourth comes when the time has come to share the wisdom gained from decades of life experience of pain, joy, loss and inner growth. The elder in this stage may feel the tug of pilgrimage and decide to leave behind the familiar and safe to embark on a journey of unknown destination, taking little or nothing with her.

Jesus invited the good ruler on just such a pilgrimage, saying, “Sell all you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Luke 18:22). St. Columba, founder of the monastery on the sacred isle of Iona, also speaks of this in a sermon:

God counseled Abraham to leave his own country and go in pilgrimage into the land which God had shown him, to wit the “Land of Promise”—Now the good counsel which God enjoined here on the father of the faithful is incumbent on all the faithful: that is to leave their country and their land, their wealth and their worldly delight for the sake of the Lord of the Elements, and go in perfect pilgrimage in imitation of Him.

--from *The Celtic Way of Prayer*, by Esther de Waal

This sounds like a literal journey, but it could also be metaphorical. Either way, if I want to be in imitation of the Lord of the Elements, to follow the way of Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head, I have to let go of possessions both material and nonmaterial, the crowd of things and thoughts that keeps me tied to my life and my limited notion of self. Traveling light is the way.

**Sacred One, help me to follow the example of Jesus.
Strengthen my commitment to reduce unnecessary possessions.
Help me to let go of burdensome attachments.
Again...and again...and again. Amen**

Only Star Dust

Tom Sopoci

In the Bible, this I read
A travel tale so bold
Says God it was that started it
In Genesis it's told

The Universe, the Galaxy
From stardust these were made
God formed a home, we named
it Earth
Into its orbit laid

Then on it shaped moist colored
clay
One early garden morn
Breathed into it consciousness
So life, from love, was born

"Go travel on in loving life
You need not live in fear"
This message given long ago
Forgotten, not so clear

Why am I here? What is it now?
Our World seems such a mess
Please tell me God, I need to know
I try, I pray, I guess

To find a clear and solid lead
I gasp as I begin
To load and carry in my head
Looking out too much, not in

It's in my heart, the message
beats
God given long ago
Like stardust of creation
A love for me to know

So while I travel on this orb
And believe this Jesus plead
"Love your neighbor as yourself"
With stardust as your lead

**Creator God, I am a part of your amazing gift of Creation,
and for this I offer my thanks and praise. Amen**

Lighter than Before

Bruce Ario

I'm not sure I've reached the point where I could say I'm traveling light, but I can safely say I'm traveling lighter than before. It wasn't necessarily through my own making – I lost my job when Steeple People closed – but now I've decided to kick back a little and have a serious time of Lent this year.

I hope to reassess some things in my life, get my priorities straight, and eventually seek a new job. In Lent I hope to gain a stronger sense of what God wishes for me and what I am able to do.

With some of my free time I plan to write, read, and meditate about the things that keep my life going. I want to be more aware and more responsive to my environment and keep on top of the political scene that is now playing out in our nation.

So you see, I won't be traveling light, just lighter than before.

**Holy God, may I use this Lenten season as an opportunity to
lighten my load—to put down what is no longer useful,
to set aside wasteful patterns,
and to focus my attention squarely on your call for my life. Amen**

Lay Down

Lay down your map and compass,
and those dog-eared travel guides,
Rest your weary eyes from so much looking,
your tired feet from so much wandering,
your aching heart from so much hoping.

Lay down on the soft green grass
wet with morning dew, and watch as
the tree heavy with pendulous pears
bends her long branches toward you,
offering you perfection in every sweet bite.

Give up the weight of knowing,
for the reverence of quiet attention
and curiosity, for the delight of
juice that runs in generous streams
down your chin.

--Christine Valters Paintner,
The Soul of a Pilgrim

**Rest my weary eyes. Soothe my tired feet. Ease my aching heart.
Help me to lay down my burdens, God,
and find moments of hope—and peace. Amen**

Travel Light and Travel Easy

Submitted by Gail Kishish

Travel light and travel easy
Till I see you once again.
Travel light and travel easy
And remember I'm your friend.
May the road rise up to greet you
As you leave your past behind.
I will think about you gently
And I'll hold you in my mind.
Travel light and travel easy
Till I see you once again.
Travel light and travel easy
And remember I'm your friend.

--Carole Eagleheart

**As I travel along my life's path,
may my load be light, may the wind be always at my back,
and may I rest secure in the palm of God's hand. Amen**

Lessons Learned Along the Journey

Betty Beach

In my travels through life there have been switches and turns, highs and lows, and both expected and unexpected turns. I have learned many things along the way.

One is the importance of staying in the present, dealing with today and trying not to project or worry about the past or what the future may bring. I tend to ruminate about things. How will it be? What if this/that happens? Very often, I project much too far, much too deep. With God as my daily companion, I try to worry less and put my faith in “all will be well...all will be well.” This personal reassurance helps to lighten my load, free my thoughts and ease my burdens. The One who breathed life into being is beside me guiding my path, lightening my load.

Another lesson I have learned is the importance of positive thinking and actions. I surround myself with positive people, friends who want the best for others and me. Ones that I feel good to be with. I try to maintain a forward positive path on my journey, not giving in to criticism or negative thinking.

A third lesson to lighten my journey is to realize over and over the inherent goodness of people. Most people want the best for each other.

In our present political climate, it is so easy to be cynical and even fearful of what is happening. When I start to despair and worry, I remind myself of all the good people that working on my behalf. The checks and balances to guide our journey; to lighten the load. To assure me once again that “all will be well.” It is very difficult in our divisive climate to keep a stable rudder. Then, I remind myself of the importance of our commonalities, our shared values, our common humanities, our togetherness.

Lastly, I put my trust in God, who is always beside me, guiding me and wanting the best for me. I am so blessed! Even when there will be some pitfalls along the way, I put my faith in God's grace.

God, guide my way as I journey on the path to wholeness. Amen

Camas Lilies

Submitted by Mary Honstead

Consider the lilies of the field,
the blue banks of camas opening
into acres of sky along the road.
Would the longing to lie down
and be washed by that beauty
abate if you knew their usefulness,
how the natives ground their bulbs
for flour, how the settlers' hogs
uprooted them, grunting in gleeful
oblivion as the flowers fell?

And you----what of your rushed and
useful life? Imagine setting it all down---
papers, plans, appointments, everything---
leaving only a note:
“Gone to the fields to be lovely.
Be back when I’m through with blooming.”

Even now, unneeded and uneaten, the
camas lilies gaze out above the grass
from their tender blue eyes.
Even in sleep your life will shine.
Make no mistake.
Of course your work will always matter.
Yet Solomon in all his glory
was not arrayed like one of these.

--Lynn Ungar

**I revel in the beauty and splendor in which I am created, Holy One.
May I boldly bloom where I am planted this day. Amen**

PALM SUNDAY

Allowing God's Light to Dwell in Us

Judy Zabel

In the 1986 film, *The Mission*, Robert De Niro plays Rodrigo Mendoza, a brutal slave trader from the conquistador era who has captured, sold and murdered many native South Americans. Although he scarcely thought twice about killing a native in the past, when Mendoza murders his brother in a fit of anger he is overcome with remorse. A Jesuit priest gives him a penance to atone for his sin: he must accompany an expedition of Jesuits deep into the rain forest, where they plan to teach the natives about Jesus Christ.

On the trek into the forest, Mendoza binds up his armor in a net. He ties a rope around this heavy burden and drags it along, to remind himself of the violent life he has left behind. The sack of armor slows the expedition, but the priests tolerate it because they know how important it is to the penitent man.

Close to their destination, the missionaries climb to the top of a waterfall. At the top, they warmly embrace the native friends they have come to know on an earlier journey. But then the natives spy the exhausted Mendoza, still ascending the rocks beside the waterfall, dragging his armor behind him.

They know him, and they fear him. One of the natives grabs a knife and runs over to Mendoza, holding the blade against his neck as though to kill him in revenge. Mendoza looks up at his assailant, preparing himself for death.

But then something surprising happens. The native does slash his knife, but what he cuts is not Mendoza's throat. He cuts the rope holding the bag of armor. The entire company watches the conquistador's burden fall away, falling end over end down the waterfall, smashing onto the rocks below.

Mendoza cries like a baby, fresh from the womb of God. A priest says, "Welcome home, brother." Then, his real instruction begins.

Ephesians 2:1-10 reminds us that God is rich in mercy because of God's great love for us. We are saved from lugging our burdens, saved from lugging our guilt around, and saved from being crushed by the weight of our regrets.

This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives

--Ephesians 2:8-10, CEB

This is GOOD NEWS.

Enlightenment doesn't come to us because we are so smart. Enlightenment or rather, en-lighten-ment comes when we receive this amazing gift of grace. When we allow God's Light to dwell in us, God lifts the burden we have of trying to be gods ourselves.

May we allow God to release our burdens so that we can travel lightly together.

**As we celebrate your triumphant entry into Jerusalem
this Palm Sunday, we offer our thanks
for your gifts of grace and mercy.**

May we release our burdens and rest in your holy light. Amen

Would That It Were So Simple

Jeff Smith

A scene from the Coen Brothers movie, “Hail Caesar,” has become a classic in our home. The director, played by Ralph Fiennes, tries to teach a young actor to say a seemingly simple line. Search You Tube for "**Would that it were so simple**" to see for yourself.

Scripture tells us that Jesus spent a lot of time when he was on earth teaching tough lessons – stuff that’s nearly impossible for me to accomplish, with all my worldly wants and worries. This passage from Matthew 6 offers one such lesson:

What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God’s giving. People who don’t know God and the way God works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how God works.

--Matthew 6:30-33, *The Message*

The older I get, the more my questions replace my certainty. If everything we are and have comes from God, why do I have such anxiety that I won’t have enough? When there is such suffering everywhere I look, why aren’t I focused more on others than myself? Why is God’s will so seemingly simple for others to understand and so complicated for me?

Would that it were so simple.

**Loving God, give me the grace to see your presence.
Help me to see you in the questions that arise and give thanks
for your ever-present love that will not abandon me. Amen**

Traveling Heavy

Jan Bucher

Steve and I had come on a retreat to Oceanside, California, an hour or so from San Diego. We stayed in a Catholic monastery, where a group of monks reside and offer group and private retreats. The monastery sits on a high hill, mountains surrounding, cars and trucks and millions of people below. We savored the beauty of the palm trees, petunias, calla lilies and the ubiquitous birds of paradise. We walked often, ate simple meals outside in the warmth.

On Sunday we went to Mass. We were surrounded by a crowd of Californians: Mexicans, Asians and a few Anglos. Mass was quite solemn; my attention span short. My focus became the little girls around us. Three sprites with curly black hair, big brown eyes. Those eyes were quick to see a baby two pews ahead of them. Their dad nodded and the girls skipped to a woman who held the baby. The girls took turns holding the infant like a doll. They then took turns sitting and snuggling the older women and men around them. Those wide-eyed charmers were being raised by a village. Each child was cuddled by an aunt, uncle and cousins.

As the Mass progressed, time came for petitions. A monk prayed for those in need. The response from the people was, "Lord hear our prayer." Voices of the people were muted, until the monk said, "For immigrants and their families, we pray." The response was loud, vociferous. "Lord, hear our prayer."

We left the church, moved by the reality of these dear ones, who may be documented or not but not free of the terror of deportation. We travel light. We travel near and far without restrictions. We travel light. Immigrants travel heavy.

**Be with us as we travel, O God.
Open our hearts to those who travel heavy. Amen**

Offering

Sally Johnson

And so
I will lay these words
down -
Judgement, rage, spite, greed,
self-righteousness, despair.
I will place them
at the altar of
Forgiveness.
With my hands outstretched
and my heart broken open
I will cling to them no longer.
Here no power leaks
from them.
Here, their influence is
diluted by the grace
that finds its way
into the curves and crevices
of each letter, each syllable, each sound.
My worn and blended knees
creak as a rise
from what has been the deepest
Place of prayer.
Lighter now
I can walk into my life once again.

**Gracious and loving God, make us gentle and kind in all the words
we speak. May we be reflections of your compassionate Spirit
this day. Amen**

Maundy Thursday

Letting Go

David Smith

I feel that I have advanced very far since my Sunday School days with my image and concepts of God. I'm even thinking that I'm a Progressive Christian. Then I experience readings that show I have more to unburden in order to travel further. This is such a reading.

We tend, you see, to project our own image onto God. Letting go of projection will be far more difficult than sharing the duties and privileges of ministry. It is one thing to let women serve at the altar, but quite another to see God as having a feminine nature. It is one thing to countenance gay clergy and members, but quite another to see them as reflecting a fundamental aspect of God's being. We integrate our pews, but do we yet welcome a multiracial God? We pray alongside Muslims, but can we understand Islam as possessing a legitimate portion of God's truth? We are okay with letting children come close, but what about lepers, outcasts, criminals, people so unlike us that we are offended by the idea that they, too, reflect the image of God?

This work will shake our foundations, because it means that God is far larger than anything we have countenanced, and therefore is beyond our desire to limit and to define.

We must imagine more than we will ever see, and become humble in the face of what we cannot control. Then we must listen to all of creation for what it says of the author.

What does it mean to be 'made in your image'? It means far more than we ever thought possible.

--Thomas Ehrich, *Just Wondering, Jesus: 100 Questions People Want to Ask* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse Publishing, 2005), pp. 136-37.

Question-planting-God, challenge me this day to see your movement in ways that startle and surprise me.

Give me courage to go to these places with faith and hope for your Spirit which is ever new. Amen

GOOD FRIDAY

Never Prayerless

Ingrid Bloom

What possible prayer could we pray in the face of what is happening in our country?

Then I remembered: We are never prayerless. The Spirit intercedes deep within us, praying the prayer of Jesus, that we may be one and that this world will be mended. The Spirit weeps and grieves with us: God hurts with me when purity of heart and good will is not there. God hurts with me when good things are taken for granted or not appreciated. God hurts with me when we feel daggers because deep listening and receptiveness is missing, or when arrogance divides and separates. God hurts with me when selfishness keeps us from caring or knowing each other. God hurts with me when we use information to punish and hurt. God hurts with me when gossip is used to be right or distance us from each other. God gives courage to keep listening, to look for moments of vulnerability, purity, and light in the midst of hearing what is so grievous and heartbreaking. God gives faith to keep acting in beneficial ways. God gives insight to where her Spirit is working and manifesting, even in the midst of meanness, anxiety, control, indifference, avoidance. Help us to hear your deep intercession for this world, for ourselves, and give us the faith and courage to be part of it.

I'm encouraged by 1 Peter 4:10-11: *Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one who is speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do it with the strength that God supplies.*

I share in Joyce Rupp's prayer:

Yes to you, Jesus

As you offer me your love
As you letter my life with yourself
As you encourage my transparency
As you ask for my honesty
As you desire my everything
As you speak through all I do
As you continue my transformation
As you challenge my weaknesses
As you bless my giftedness

As you take who I am into your loving embrace
Yes to you, Jesus
As you catch me up in your arms
As you fire me with your truth
As you seal me with your goodness
As you bless me with the blessing
That only your Father can give

Loving God, I have faith that I will find treasures to give away. Amen

Having a Light to Follow

Bill Mate

I was meandering down a narrow street into the dusk of night. Each time my walking stick struck the cobblestones, it echoed off the stucco walled apartments with bright colored doors and neatly planted flower boxes under the windows. There were muffled indistinct conversations from the rear of buildings and a few kids playing and laughing on the street. As I rounded the corner and crested the hill I had been climbing there was a tiny hotel with a small sign that said: “traveling light?” Welcome.

Then I woke up! Don't we all, at times, have dreams of traveling unencumbered? But there is the dog needing a sitter; the child who has chosen to play soccer for what seems a half a year; the wife or husband in the midst of a major project and simply unable to leave work for the next several weeks; family birthdays, weddings, people coming to town. And then there is all the stuff we've accumulated over time that needs to be sorted to what is useable. Make your list. It is simply not easy to travel lightly—or quickly.

Perhaps traveling light is more about attitude. You know, “one thing at a time and it will all get done;” or “it is just a time in our life when it is like this;”—or, or—we know the drill of trying this attitude adjustment because we've done it many times!

So perhaps traveling light is more about having a light to follow. Does what I am spending time on give me satisfaction for doing something well? Does what I'm involved with teach me something new about the world and my interaction in it? Does what I'm doing have a sense of playfulness and a sense of community? Does what is happening at the moment give me pause to be grateful for being interconnected with others and the creativity of this grand creation?

Maybe this is all a dream.

**God of Our Waking and Sleeping, travel with us this day
and this night. Fill our waking hours and our sleeping dreams
with an openness that is illuminated by your love. Amen**

EASTER SUNDAY

Our True Home

Our true home is in the present moment.

To live in the present moment is a miracle.

The miracle is not to walk on water.

The miracle is to walk on the green Earth in the present moment,
to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now.

Peace is all around us -

in the world and in nature -

and within us -

in our bodies and our spirits.

Once we learn to touch this peace,
we will be healed and transformed.

It is not a matter of faith;

it is a matter of practice.

--Thich Nhat Hahn



**On this Easter Sunday, may we discover the miracles
in our present moments and in the presence of each other.
Amen**