

A 40-DAY JOURNEY

Lent: True Fasting



Jan Richardson, *Rend Your Heart*

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away
from your own flesh and blood?
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.*

Isaiah 58:6-9

Ash Wednesday

“You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”

Isaiah 58:4b,6

As the global Church enters into the penitential season of Lent, we desire to walk with Jesus and be shaped by His heart for justice, mercy, and the most vulnerable among us. Lent is historically a time for practicing three particular spiritual disciplines: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. For the next forty days of Lent, we invite you to join us on a journey to discover the heart of God found in Isaiah 58: true fasting.

What does true fasting mean in the Scriptures? And what does it mean for us today? This Lenten season, we will consider and practice true fasting as God describes it in Isaiah 58. We will learn how to pray together for the needs of our neighbors. And we will learn about our fellow Anglicans who already “spend themselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed” (Isa 58:10), and how we can come alongside them in support.

DAY 1



Meena Matocha, *Into the Bright Sadness*, 2019. Charcoal, ashes, soil, acrylic, and wax, 12 × 12 in.

Today, we enter into the season of Lent through the observance of Ash Wednesday. Christians around the world will gather to examine their hearts, confess their sin, and be reminded of their own mortality. If you attend an Ash Wednesday service today, you will more than likely go forward, and a priest will dip his or her finger into a bowl of ashes, then use same that finger to gently mark your forehead with a cross, while speaking this over you:

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

DAY 1

In today's breathtaking painting, artist Meena Matocha uses ashes, charcoal, and soil to help us contemplate what it means to enter "into the bright sadness"¹ of Lent. That phrase captures the tension and paradox of life as followers of Christ, a tension which is especially present during Lent. It is a time for self-examination, for repentance, and for self-denial. Yet it is also a season that looks toward the brightness of Easter. We are not alone in our penitence; Christ is always with us.

Christ is always with the vulnerable, too. At M25i, our mission is to "to equip and sustain Anglicans serving alongside the vulnerable." Isaiah 58 describes many of those vulnerable: the oppressed, the hungry, the poor wanderers without shelter, the naked, those bound by the chains of injustice.

But according to the word of God spoken through Isaiah, our fasting is not "true fasting," if we also exploit our workers, or oppress the weak, or fail to care for the vulnerable, the oppressed, and the hungry. In fact, if that's the case, **then all our fasting and prayers may be for nought.**

What a sobering, heartbreaking thought. If there are any barriers between our voice and God's ear, we surely want to do whatever we can to eliminate them. Let us enter into the season of Lent together, discovering both the heart of God for the vulnerable, and the true fasting that He desires, so that all of His creation might flourish together and come into his shalom.

"You cannot fast as you
do today and expect
your voice to be heard
on high."

Isaiah 58:4b

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

God's Kingdom Heart

"To be a responsible person is to find one's role in the building of shalom, the re-webbing of God, humanity, and all creation in justice, harmony, fulfillment, and delight."

Cornelius Plantinga

Isaiah 58:6-12 welcomes us into “the air of the kingdom.” The atmosphere of God’s love is expressed in society, in his design for the flourishing of all. The message of scripture is consistent. Worship and action cannot be separated. If we know the true God, then we live in a way that reflects his heart both individually and collectively. And his heart is all about shalom. As we live in trusting love and surrender to his good ways, we experience shalom (v 8-9, 10b-12).

There is no such thing as worship without care, without contending for the shalom of others, especially the vulnerable. The message of all the prophets is, “You were once vulnerable and outsiders and blocked from flourishing. You could be again at any moment. Don’t allow anybody to be blocked from flourishing. Cultivate environments where those struggling can receive care and strengthening.”

Many who teach this passage describe the if-then dynamic as descriptive; in other words, “If you wish to get wet in the rains of this blessing, then you need to step outside.” Additionally, Old Testament scholars such as Daniel Carroll Rodas argue, “It is appropriate for God to have demands on his people. Relationships come with expectations; for example, in marriage, it is right to have expectations of each other and to challenge when not met.”

Flourish:

(of a person, animal, or other living organism) to grow or develop in a healthy or robust way, especially as the result of a particularly favorable environment

Flourishing:

(intransitive verb) to grow luxuriously

DAY 2

During Lent, we will be unpacking the “if” part of this Isaiah passage. Of course, we will merely be able to highlight six arenas in our weeks together, but the goal is to educate, equip, furnish our imaginations, and put specificity around concepts, issues, and numbers.

Shalom: *refers biblically to a state of wholeness, completeness, and well-being in all aspects of life—personal, social, economic, and spiritual. It is both individual and the ecosystems around each person. Biblically associated terms are mishpat and (k)hesed, which are richer words than our English translations of compassion and mercy. These words in scripture connote a richness of vision and a vigorous thriving into that vision.*

Followers of Christ have always done this work. Anglicans have always done this work. Anglicans doing this work are reminding us of “the kingdom air” -- the kingdom atmosphere and climate -- that pulls us into the beautiful “thens” that we long for.

Read the passage on the following page in this if/then structure. Consider it an invitation to step outside into the rains of love, mercy, and shalom that is God’s heart for all of us, whether vulnerable and not-as-vulnerable, all of us dependent on his rescue. This is what true worship of this true God means.



IF...

You loose the chains of injustice
untie the cords of the yoke
set the oppressed free
break every yoke

You share your food with the
hungry
provide the poor wanderer with
shelter —

when you see the naked, to clothe
them
don't turn away from your own
flesh and blood

You do away with the yoke of
oppression
do away with pointing finger and
malicious talk

You spend yourselves in behalf of
the hungry
satisfy the needs of the
oppressed,



THEN...

Your light will break forth like the dawn,
your healing will quickly appear;
your righteousness[a] will go before you,
the glory of the Lord will be your rear
guard.

You will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say:
Here am I.

Your light will rise in the darkness,
your night will become like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-
scorched land

He will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.

Your people will rebuild the ancient
ruins,

you will raise up the age-old
foundations;

you will be called Repairer of Broken
Walls, Restorer of Streets with
Dwellings.

A Look Ahead

"Shalom is both God's cause in the world and our human calling."

Nicholas Wolterstorff

We hope this devotional has already proven helpful as you consider the call of God to serve the vulnerable. As we head into the first weekend of Lent, we want to give you a heads up on what you can expect going forward. Each day during Lent we will examine the themes of Isaiah 58 through the following lenses:

- **Biblical Foundations:** caring for those who are trafficked, in poverty, food insecure, unhoused, and displaced. Connecting the dots with our times.
- **Lean in and Learn:** a guide to increase our literacy on these topics
- **Contemplative Activists:** stories of prayerful good samaritans in Church history
- **Anglicans on the Street:** real stories of local and global examples of Anglicans drawing near to those Christ loves right now
- **Creative Prayer:** we cannot carry these topics on our own shoulders, so we offer exercises to allow God to shape our hearts towards trust

DAY 3



Sanctuary, Trygve Skogrand

Notice in this piece how Skogrand engages the goal of his art: to meet “the sacred and the temporal.” Imagine how his education and work as a Civil Engineer in city planning might have shaped his art. As God's people, we are all called to this “meeting” of Christ in the grit of the world.

DAY 3

On this journey through Lent, we will take time each week to learn about some of our fellow Anglicans who are doing this work of "true fasting":

*"to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them..."*

Isaiah 58:7

We will grow to better perceive poverty and vulnerability in our own setting, and we will get glimpses of the many faithful Anglicans who have encountered such suffering in their contexts, both globally and around North America. We will be inspired by how their awareness of the physical and spiritual needs around them leads them to respond with grace and mercy. With more than 80 million Anglicans worldwide, we are a powerful community that can make a big difference in the world.

*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.*

Matthew 6:33

Light in the Darkness

"How far that little candle throws his beams!

So shines a good deed in a weary world."

William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice

"All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle."

St. Francis of Assisi

We are transitioning from The Season of Light (Advent/Christmas/Epiphany) into Lent, the season of reminding ourselves how dark the world is without Christ, how desperately we need Easter after Good Friday. There is no hope without the resurrection, but we must know what death means for life in Christ to have its full import.

We do not need reminders of darkness. But we must resist escape or despair, callousness or distraction. We are called to hold light strong and bright in the darkness. William Shakespeare speaks to it at the turn of the 17th century. St. Francis speaks to it at the turn of the 12th century. They are both hinting at Isaiah 58 which beckons, attracts, calls to our aching as we listen to the challenge:

Then your light will break forth like the dawn...

then your light will rise in the darkness,

and your night will become like the noonday.

Isaiah 58:8, 10

Prayer for Light in Darkness

Tiona Cage

Beautiful Jesus
Who is steady and constant and firm
Solid and living, comforting yet powerful

Lord, let us be overtaken by You, by your Light
That we may be so transformed into the likeness of Your Spirit
whose very essence is life

That our sole desire would be to fight
For connection
For justice
For the un-silencing of voices

Father, let us be so filled with You, with your Light
That love would wander into every crevice of brokenness
That has shattered the hope of the ones forgotten

That the darkness would have no choice
but to surrender into the shadows of shalom
And, that we would know the all-consuming surrender of
reverence
Of admiration for the beauty of Your image
in each and every person we meet
So that we, in turn, would reflect back Your Light

This Light of hope
And joy
And redemption

This Light of forgiveness
And truth
That we would become reflections of You
That we would become lights in the dark

Amen.



Human Trafficking

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim... freedom for the prisoners and to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Luke 4:18-19

In Isaiah 58, God’s people ask Him, “Why have we fasted and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?”

They are fasting, but they’re not “seeing results,” we might say.

In response, God has some rather strong words for His people:

“Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God.”

As if they were a nation that does what is right.... Ouch.

Why isn’t the fasting of the Israelites pleasing to God? He tells them plainly:

“On the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”

DAY 5

God tells us here that he cares deeply about the oppressed. Who are the oppressed among us? One of the primary populations experiencing oppression today are the victims of human trafficking. But most of us are not law enforcement, social workers, therapists, or lawyers. We certainly don't consider ourselves oppressors. So how do we engage this biblical challenge? We suggest that we can be agitators for the sake of prevention.

Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are people who want crops without ploughing the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning; they want the ocean without the roar of its many waters.

The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both. But it must be a struggle.

Frederick Douglass, formerly enslaved person

Human trafficking happens all over the world, including throughout North America. The yokes and chains borne by victims of human trafficking are almost impossibly painful for us to imagine, and yet God calls us not only to imagine, but to be part of breaking those yokes of oppression and setting the captives free.

This is the kind of fasting God has chosen. This kind of fasting is part of our calling and part of our identity as God's people. He deeply loves the oppressed, and he deeply loves those who are being trafficked, who are alone in their pain and grief and fear. God asks us to loose their chains, and to do what we can to set the victims of human trafficking free.

We can participate in doing the ordinary, not-flashy, simple work of showing up for those who would be vulnerable to being trafficked before such horrors happen. We will consider some of the facts and factors tomorrow.

DAY 5

It is estimated that 50 million people are held in slavery today around the world.

How do we face these unsettling realities without giving in to the weight of heaviness and despair, or becoming overwhelmed, numb, and indifferent?

Our theology will shape our response.

- We believe God's heart is grieved and angry at the exploitation of His people, who are made in His image.
- We trust that He is hot in the pursuit of their freedom and in carrying out justice on their behalf.
- We know that He draws near to those who are broken, hurting, and crying out for rescue. He hears the cry of the oppressed.

God implores us into this fight for the freedom of every human life, every soul that possesses eternal value, everybody created in his image, every person made to be cared for and valued, not exploited and discarded.

The end of slavery begins with prayer, education, and advocacy. We must educate ourselves and spread the word to those who may not know what is happening right under our noses.



Choichun Leung, *Bound Girl with Diamond Tears*

DAY 5

Turn your gaze to the image on the previous page "Bound Girl with Diamond Tears," and pray this prayer, feeling the grace of your own freedom. Contend for shalom.

Dear Lord,

You demand justice for the many children, beloved of you, who have been wronged. Give strength to people who investigate and prosecute traffickers. Encourage them when they are weary. Give courage to survivors when they are asked to testify against their former captors. Let Your justice prevail. Sustain those who companion the survivors on the long journey towards healing and hope.

Give us, who are not on the front lines of rescue, the ability to see the child, woman, or youth whose struggle might make them vulnerable to being preyed upon. Enable and empower us to inconvenience our lives with service and to love sacrificially. These beloved ones are under your gaze in North America but we can be blind to them because of our busyness or ignorance. Help us see. Help us act. Help us agitate with a heart towards true fasting.

Amen.²

Human Trafficking

"You may choose to look the other way but you can never again say you did not know."

William Wilberforce

God calls us to take up His work of justice. To “be fair to the poor and to orphans. Defend the helpless and everyone in need. Rescue the weak and homeless from the powerful hands of heartless people.” (Psalm 82:3-4) As followers of Christ, the One who sets the prisoners free, we join Him in a work that makes His heart bleed.



Corban Addison, A Walk Across the Sun

DAY 6 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

As we were reminded yesterday, an estimated 50 million people are held in slavery today around the world (International Justice Mission).

That's more people than the combined population of Texas and New York. 50 million lives stolen, identities ripped away, souls disregarded by the horror that is modern day slavery.

- An estimated 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked in the US each year
- Canada suffers somewhere between 250 and 460 annual trafficking cases.
- 802 trafficking cases were reported in Mexico in 2022 according to a German platform that specializes in data gathering.

That doesn't mean those are the only cases in which trafficking has occurred: they are the only the ones that have been reported. We can all be trained to have eyes to "see" and uncover what is hidden in darkness. "Vulnerability" is the key term; the greater the unnoticed and unaddressed vulnerability, the more likely victims and their predators are hidden.

Good News! Anglicans are making a difference, like John Nehme, who is the Executive Director of Allies Against Slavery. Allies is a Texas and Louisiana-based organization that fights human trafficking through data platforms, partnerships, and resources. They partnered with the University of Texas to publish Human Trafficking by the Numbers: the Initial Benchmark of Prevalence & Economic Impact for Texas.

In this research, they discovered that there were an estimated 313,000 trafficking victims in Texas. They also found that 88% of victims report that they interacted with a professional (nurses, child welfare workers, school counselors, juvenile justice personnel, etc) who missed the chance to recognize their situation and help them escape. Allies equips people with the tools to identify and aid trafficked victims. Allies have over 1800 field professionals in these various organizations screening people across two states.

DAY 6 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

Let's separate trafficking facts and vulnerability factors. The first points to dire consequences that wreck us and angers God. The second speaks to prevention and obstructing horrific damage and delights God. Wouldn't we prefer prevention and protection over rescue and restoration of victims a million times over? Consider these two categories of "facts."

TRAFFICKING FACTS

- **One in four victims of forced labor trafficking is a child.** According to stopchildexploitation.org, 15 million children in the US are estimated to be physically exploited each year. 8 million cases are officially reported, but some experts believe it is a staggering 24 million.
- **One in six endangered runaways reported in the United States are likely to become victims of sex trafficking.**
- **A supposed 90% of labor trafficking takes place within the private economy:** homes, businesses, and supply chains, where people can be swept under the rug, exploited, forgotten, trapped.
- **Only 3% of annual reported victims in the US receive temporary safety through government programs,** and an estimated 2/3rds of victims never have their exploitation recorded in the United States.

We who are ordinary citizens and parishioners can make a huge difference by interrupting the downward spiral of susceptibility to predators.

DAY 6 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

VULNERABILITY FACTS

Understand these statistics as "the age of unprecedented vulnerability" (John Nehme, Allies Against Slavery) in the US, especially for kids.

- The poverty rate in the U.S. more than doubled from a historic low of 5.2 percent in 2021 to 12.4 percent in 2022. That's the largest rise in the poverty rate in the previous 50 years.
- The US Surgeon General released an advisory saying we have an "epidemic of loneliness and isolation" in our country. One survey found that 61% of 18-25-year-olds reported feeling lonely "frequently" or "almost all the time or all the time."
- The Financial Times reported that one in 25 American five-year-olds today will not make it to their 40th birthday. The majority of those deaths are not health-related. Instead, they are called "deaths of despair" – gun-related deaths, suicide, homicide, and overdoses.

May the resources linked below help you as you continue to learn the horrors of modern-day slavery and consider the ways you can help.

[Allies Against Slavery](#)

[International Justice Mission](#)

[Stop Child Exploitation](#)

[The National Human Trafficking Hotline](#)

[The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking](#)

[Journey Out](#)

What is a Contemplative Activist?

As Christ-followers, mirroring His incarnational work in the world, we have been given a rich legacy in the lives of the saints and other heroes of the faith, those men and women who modeled for us the lives of contemplative activism. When answers are few and far between, we look to them who have drawn near to the poor in their distress, giving us an example to follow.

We define “contemplative activists” as those walking the Jesus rhythm. Jesus went up the mountain to be with His Father and pray and then returned to his life of service, engagement, and action, walking in the places of the world that needed mending. As Anglicans loving “the least of these,” we believe that our lives of prayer form the source of our work among the vulnerable. In turn, our closeness to suffering shapes our prayer lives and understanding of Christ as the Ultimate Healer and Savior.

Josephine Bakhita

"I have given everything to my Master: He will take care of me... The best thing for us is not what we consider best, but what the Lord wants of us!"

St. Josephine Bakhita

Josephine Margaret Bakhita, the patron saint of Sudan and victim of human trafficking, suffered immense cruelty under slavery, yet is remembered now for her gentleness and hospitality.

Josephine was born to a respected Daju family in the Darfur region of Sudan in 1869. At the age of 8, Josephine was kidnapped and enslaved by Arab traders. Over the course of two months, she was sold twice and forced to walk over 600 hundred miles to a slave market in southern Sudan. She changed hands so many times, she was unable to remember her given name. During her enslavement in Sudan, she was given the name Bakhita, which means "fortunate" in Arabic.

When Josephine was 14, a Turkish general sold her to an Italian consul, who brought her to Italy. Shortly after arriving in Italy, the consul gave her to a family to serve as a nanny to their daughter. While the parents were away on business, Josephine and their daughter stayed with the Canossian Sisters. During her time with the Sisters, Josephine learned about God and his ministry on Earth and was deeply moved. She said once that she always knew God existed, but just didn't know who he was.

DAY 7 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST



Icon by Franciscan iconographer Robert Lentz, All Saints Catholic Church

At age 21, she was baptized, confirmed, and given the name Josephine Margaret. When the parents came to retrieve their daughter, Josephine refused to leave the institute. After three days of back and forth, the Mother Superior of the Sisters petitioned the Italian authorities on Josephine's behalf. They granted Josephine freedom on the basis that slavery had been outlawed in Darfur before her birth and Italy did not recognize slavery.

At 27, Josephine took the final vows to become a Canossian sister. For the next 50 years of her life, Josephine served as a doorkeeper and cook at a convent in Schio, Vicenza. She received everyone at the door with a warm smile and gentle spirit. During World War II, the people in her village regarded St. Josephine as their protector. Though Schio was bombed, not a single citizen died during the war.

Towards the end of her life, Josephine began using a wheelchair due to chronic pain. When asked how she was, St. Josephine Bakhita would respond, choosing very deliberate language speaking to the sovereignty of Christ who was also the tender Good Shepherd. Her response was: "As the Master desires." She knew her God as the suffering servant in whose love she rested and was made free.

Not Alone Ministries

"Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light."

Helen Keller

This week, we are connecting the evil of human trafficking with the conditions that lead to predators having confidence they will be able to manipulate: vulnerability.

Vulnerability takes innumerable forms. It is the condition of being exposed, open to harm and danger. In the ancient world, cities would build walls around themselves as a means of defense from those who would seek to do harm. We pray over the vulnerable that God would provide a hedge of protection physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Job 1:10).

But what happens when that wall is damaged, that barrier removed? What is our role in identifying places of vulnerability and rebuilding walls in our neighborhoods and communities?

*"And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in."*

Isaiah 58:12



Not Alone Ministries partners with local churches to create communities for single moms to find hope, healing, and wholeness. Whether providing housing support to keep these families from experiencing homelessness or fostering deep relational connections and ties with local churches, they are seeking to repair the breaches in these families.

DAY 8 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

As we have been focusing on the evils of trafficking, remember that we all can be bearers of justice and peace. Sometimes it's little actions that collectively bring safety and protection.

Not Alone tells one such story of a school teacher who lives near the school her teenage daughter attends, but was unable to get her there safely due to her work schedule. Because of several factors, the teenage girl was at risk in walking to school. The team at Not Alone jumped in and created a safe carpool plan to ensure that this girl could get to and from school and her mom could work. Is this a small thing, or is it life-changing?

Vulnerable single mothers can be protected from oppressive conditions and manipulative opportunists. Their children and teenagers can be shielded from being targeted by predators and people who would want to take advantage of them. It is possible to avert abusive circumstances when God, through his people, offers covering and care.

REPAIR THE BREACH

In chapter 3 of Nehemiah, there are 38 names listed of those who were involved in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. Each of them, with very different trades, titles, and economic backgrounds took a section of the wall and focused their energies there. By working together and doing their part, the wall was rebuilt and worship was restored.

As we seek to be “repairers of the breach, restorers of the streets to dwell in,” what is the section of wall to which you are called? If it is single moms and their children, M25i ministries like Not Alone would love to partner with you and your church.

A Conversation with Gary Haugen

"Joy is the oxygen for doing hard things."

Gary Haugen

In December 2023, at the beginning of Advent on the feast day of St. Nicholas, ARDF and M25i hosted a webinar conversation with Gary Haugen, CEO and founder of International Justice Mission. In the words of [Coracle](#) director Bill Haley, Gary Haugen is the one who “put justice on the map” for many Christians; in other words, he opened up the topic of justice for many people and many churches by bringing us a new awareness of the issues at stake, through a Christian lens.

Gary himself is an Anglican and he knows what it looks like to pursue justice as an Anglican. It's hard. It's messy, and dark, and it can be overwhelming if we're not rooted in Christ and clinging to the hem of his robe. Gary offers us deep and hard-won wisdom on how to persevere in this work of justice, without losing our hope and joy.

Grab a cup of tea, get comfortable, and settle into a rich listen:

Listen

*He lifted me out of the
slimy pit, out of the
mud and mire; he set
my feet on a rock and
gave me a firm place to
stand.*

Psalm 40:2

DAY 9

As you listen, think about the things you've learned this week regarding human trafficking:

- How might you pray against human trafficking more effectively?
- How you might join in the fight against human trafficking, especially through prevention among vulnerable populations?
- What is God saying to you? To what might he be calling you?

Loving Father,

We seek your divine protection for all who are exploited and enslaved.

For those forced into labor, trafficked into sexual slavery, and denied freedom.

We beseech you to release them from their chains.

Grant them protection, safety, and empowerment.

Restore their dignity and provide them a new beginning.

Show us how we might end exploitation by addressing its causes.

Help us reach out in support of victims and survivors of human trafficking.

Make us instruments of your spirit for their liberation.

For this we pray through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

*Amen.*³

Let Us Cry Out

"The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God."

Exodus 2:23



Art by [Zoriana Sand](#)

Our hearts are crushed and we feel powerless. How do we talk to God about the soul wrenching evil that is slavery in the US, Canada, and Mexico, our priority network countries in ACNA? We know that we are reflecting on roughly over 2 million God-imaged unique expressions of his heart and craft. 2 million dear-to-God who are dehumanized and oppressed to a degree that we wonder if healing and freedom is available.

God listens when the despairing cry out. Let us cry out on their behalf.

DAY 10 | PRAYER

"The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering."

Exodus 3:7

Grab a friend or friends and shout the following prayer out loud. If we are alone in our rooms or cars, yell this prayer. Share it with our parish leadership and worship pastors and we pray collectively with one voice.

Our Father in Heaven, today we pray for more than 50 million men, women and child who are trapped by the bonds of slavery through exploitation and trafficking worldwide. God, we declare that slavery is an abomination in your sight and a grave injustice against a people created in your image.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Our Father in Heaven, we pray first for the victims of slavery and human trafficking. They are surrounded by brokenness, human greed and deception, enslaved through no fault of their own. Father, be near them and minister to them in their suffering. In these dark places, send your Light through your angels, and provide your children with heavenly comfort and love. We pray that your Holy Spirit will attend them so they will not despair, but receive your hope, healing and restoration in body and soul. Father, in the name of your Son Jesus, we ask that you deliver them from their oppressors.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

DAY 10 | PRAYER

Our Father in Heaven, we also pray for traffickers who are tempted to exploit and enslave others for their own gratification. We pray that you would change their hearts, pierce their consciences, and bring about repentance. We pray that the darkness of their actions be brought into the light so that this injustice will be stopped. Just as you, God, transformed Saul the persecutor, into Paul your servant, we pray that you also transform traffickers into guardians of the vulnerable for the glory of your great name.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Our Father in Heaven, we ask for the wisdom and courage to stand in solidarity with the men, women, and children who are enslaved today. We pray for all individuals and organizations working against this injustice in our world, our nation, our state and our city, including [find out who is doing this work near you and pray for them]. Give them encouragement and perseverance in their work with the [find local stats] victims of trafficking identified right now in [your town, city, state]. Empower us through your Holy Spirit to respond to this population in love, serve with compassion, and offer your message of eternal hope and freedom. May the church, your bride, participate with you in your work of making all things new.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

As we wrap up this week of focus on human trafficking, we invite you to end your prayer time by offering up to the Lord all the people and issues associated with this very heavy topic, and to speak Jesus over it all. Ultimately, we trust that He is good and He will right every wrong.

Food Insecurity

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

Isaiah 58: 6,8

God's people asked Him, "Why have we fasted and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?" In response, God begins to speak strong words to his people, and there is much for us to consider. Last week we examined the first part of God's response; today, we will look at what he says next.

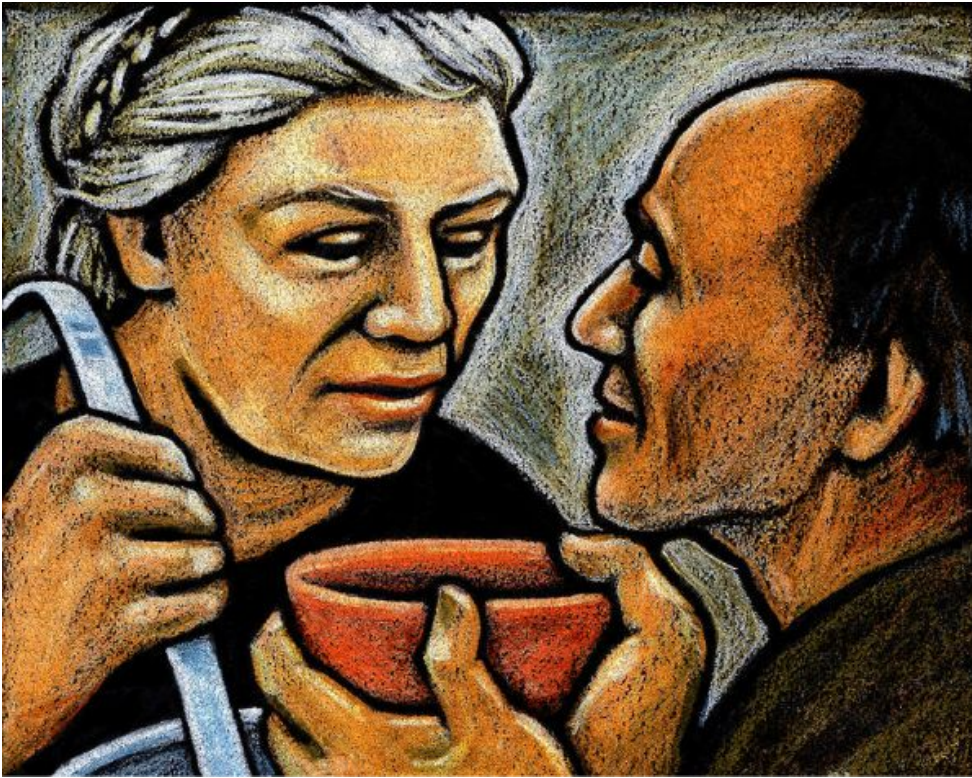
After speaking of setting the oppressed free and breaking every yoke, the next aspect of God's chosen fast is this: **"Is it not to share your food with the hungry?"**

Further into the passage, in verse 11, God specifically calls out the issue once more; this time as part of the "IF" verses we highlighted on Day 2 : **"If you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry..."**

In other words, God wants his people to do just that – to spend themselves for those who have less to eat, who go to sleep each night with empty bellies, uncertain from where their next meal may come.

Hunger knows no friend but its feeder.

Aristophanes



Dorothy Day Feeding the Hungry, by Julie Lonneman

In fact, Scripture abounds with references and directives about feeding the hungry; this passage in Isaiah 58 is just one of many. His heart for the hungry is evident throughout his Word. We even step back from hunger to first understand the essential and primal connection between food and being human and Scripture's focus on this theme. From the abundant food in the Garden of Eden to the feasting imagery of Isaiah 25 that describes heaven, meals are essential. Part of God's reshaping his people towards his vision of a new society, after slavery and in the wilderness and before the promised land, involved feeding them manna daily. Food matters to God.

The Eucharist is drink and food that anchors our story as followers of Christ, who charged us with meal remembrance of him and his story. The language in this core Isaiah 58 passage of "a true fast," and the language of this core practice of Lent is "fasting." Choosing in some way to go without. Being hungry is having that choice taken from you by circumstances.

DAY 11

This God cannot bear, and the prophets and the early church knew this and acted; and when they didn't act, God challenged. Therefore, we open ourselves up to being challenged.

THREE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

"And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat."

Exodus 16:17-18

"Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry."

Psalms 146:5-7

*"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and he who has no money, come, buy and eat,
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food."*

Isaiah 55:1-2

DAY 11

Food insecurity is an issue all over the world, including North America. Few of us know what it is like to be perpetually hungry, but it is actually all around us. God is calling us to help alleviate that hunger – not only to share our food with those who do not have enough to eat, but to think bigger:

What is causing food insecurity? How can we be part of ending this problem? How can we be part of bringing God's shalom to the hungry?

This is the kind of fasting God has chosen. This kind of fasting is part of our calling, and part of our identity as God's people. People who live with food insecurity are people just like us: parents who are trying to provide for their children, the elderly who can no longer afford food, the single father working multiple jobs to make ends meet. Each are created in God's image, and He deeply loves them. Consider in this that we are talking about nourishment, and the quality of our food determines health, mental capacity to learn in school, and energy to make good choices. God sees. God cares. And, therefore...

God asks us not only to share our food with the hungry, but to spend ourselves on their behalf. Reflect on the words "spend yourself." There is no ambiguity in this biblical language. We will take time this week unpacking what this might mean for us.

"Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? "

James 2:15-16

Food Insecurity

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink."

Matthew 25:35

Food insecurity exists in large part due to poverty. It is a commonly misheld belief that those living in poverty in North America, especially in the United States and Canada, "must not have it so bad." And the perception is that, comparatively, the form of poverty is not as extreme and degrading as in other countries.

However, when we compare the countries in North America (United States, Canada, and Mexico) to other high-economy countries such as Japan, Australia, and those in the European Union, we can clearly see the disparities between these myths and the harsh realities of poverty within our borders.



This 3-D mural in Detroit was created by artist Carlos Alberto as part of a series of six murals around the United States, created to raise awareness of food insecurity. The project is called "Zero Hunger."

DAY 12 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

The Matthew 25 Initiative represents all of the ACNA's three countries: Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. We will first highlight the U.S. statistics as they might be of the most surprising. While experts will dispute small ranges of accuracy over percentages and numbers, the overwhelming agreement by all is that the data is sobering.

POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

- The USDA estimated that **11.1%** of US households were food insecure in 2018. This means that approximately **14.3 million households** had difficulty providing enough food for all their members due to a lack of resources. Rates of food insecurity were substantially higher than the national average for households with incomes near or below the Federal poverty line.
- Between the ages of 20 and 75, **75%** of all Americans will spend at least one year in or near poverty.
- According the U.S. Census Bureau, two thirds of the poor classify themselves as White Americans.
- Today, the U.S. holds the highest poverty rate, **17.8%**, among the world's 26 most developed countries. That's **42.3 million people**. **20.9%** of them are children living in poverty.
- The U.S. poverty gap is at a stunning **39.8%**, the highest on this 26-country list. The term "poverty gap" is used to indicate the percentage distance from the poverty line to the average income of those in poverty.
- The poverty-stricken can be found down nearly any street, within any demographic or racial group, and across the entire political and ideological spectrum.
- Childhood poverty has an impact upon future economic productivity, health care, and criminal justice costs, as well as increased outlays as a result of child homelessness and maltreatment, all of which leads to an annual economic cost that impacts all of society.

This is an issue of "us" not "them," if we are Americans. All citizens are impacted in one way or another by these numbers that are in-fact about people, each is a person crafted by God's love. In this context, food and nourishment becomes scarce and compromised, and God both yells and whispers his heart in scripture.

DAY 12 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

- If you live in Mexico, underemployment is a constant reality, and poverty is not a new problem. The situation continues to worsen as national economic hardship increases, reaching **16.6%** of its overall population and **19.8%** of its children. Mexico also ranks in the top 10 Latin American countries with the highest income inequality: 78% of national wealth belongs to the richest 10%.
- Canada grapples with the same challenges as **12.4%** of its population live in poverty, **14.2%** of those being children. The Canadian poverty gap is **30.4%**. Skyrocketing housing costs have impacted low-income families, making it nearly impossible to find housing that matches both their needs and their pockets.
- Indigenous Canadians are one of the demographics of people who are impacted the most; they experience many setbacks that circulate systems of poverty, such as limited job opportunities, pervasive discrimination, and educational disparities in the school systems. Indigenous leaders continue to call for efforts to aid indigenous poverty to improve overall health, societal dynamics, and reconciliation.⁴

There is good news. Prevention, interruption, agitation, restructuring, and community developing can change these statistics above. As we prayerfully fast this Lenten season, we are called to see the plight of those living below, or right at, the poverty line.

May our hunger for the things we have given up remind us of our neighbors who have no choice but to live in want of basic necessities such as food, or food nutritious enough to sustain cognitive function and support physical health. May we open our hands to give to the poor, those near and dear to the heart of Christ.

And remember that Jesus links feeding the hungry to ministering to himself. Caring for vulnerable, hungry persons is not only following Jesus' lead, it is equivalent to caring for Jesus.

*A widow came and
gave two mites,
Which then was all her
living;
She did the most of all
the host –
How can I keep from
giving?*

**Robert Franklin
Skillings**

George Müller

"It is not enough to begin to pray, nor to pray aright; nor is it enough to continue for a time to pray; but we must pray patiently, believing, continue in prayer until we obtain an answer."

George Müller

George Müller was born in Prussia (Germany) in 1805 to a tax collector and his wife. As a child and a young man, George lived rebelliously, overindulging in alcohol, gambling, and law-breaking.

After being imprisoned for trying to swindle a wealthy landlord, his father sent him to a cathedral school to become a Lutheran clergyman—more for the sake of a comfortable living than any religious zeal. In school, however, George continued to “live secretly in much sin,” as he puts it, pendulum-swinging from bursts of hollow repentance, then back to his old habits.

When George was 20, he visited a Bible study that his friend had been attending. The warmth of the Christ-followers he met that night made an impression on him. Of that night, he said, “I have not the least doubt that on that evening He began a work of grace in me... That evening was the turning point in my life.” A few weeks later, he decided to become a missionary. When George told his father, however, he was furious that his son wasn’t pursuing a stable career in the church and refused to pay for the necessary schooling.

Thus began George’s rich prayer life. Soon after getting on his knees to pray for means to attend a missionary training institution, a professor offered him a German language tutoring job. Upon completing his training, George moved to Bristol, England, where he married Mary Groves and served as the pastor of a small congregation. He refused the salary offered by the church, and instead trusted on the power of prayer to supply his daily needs.

DAY 13 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST



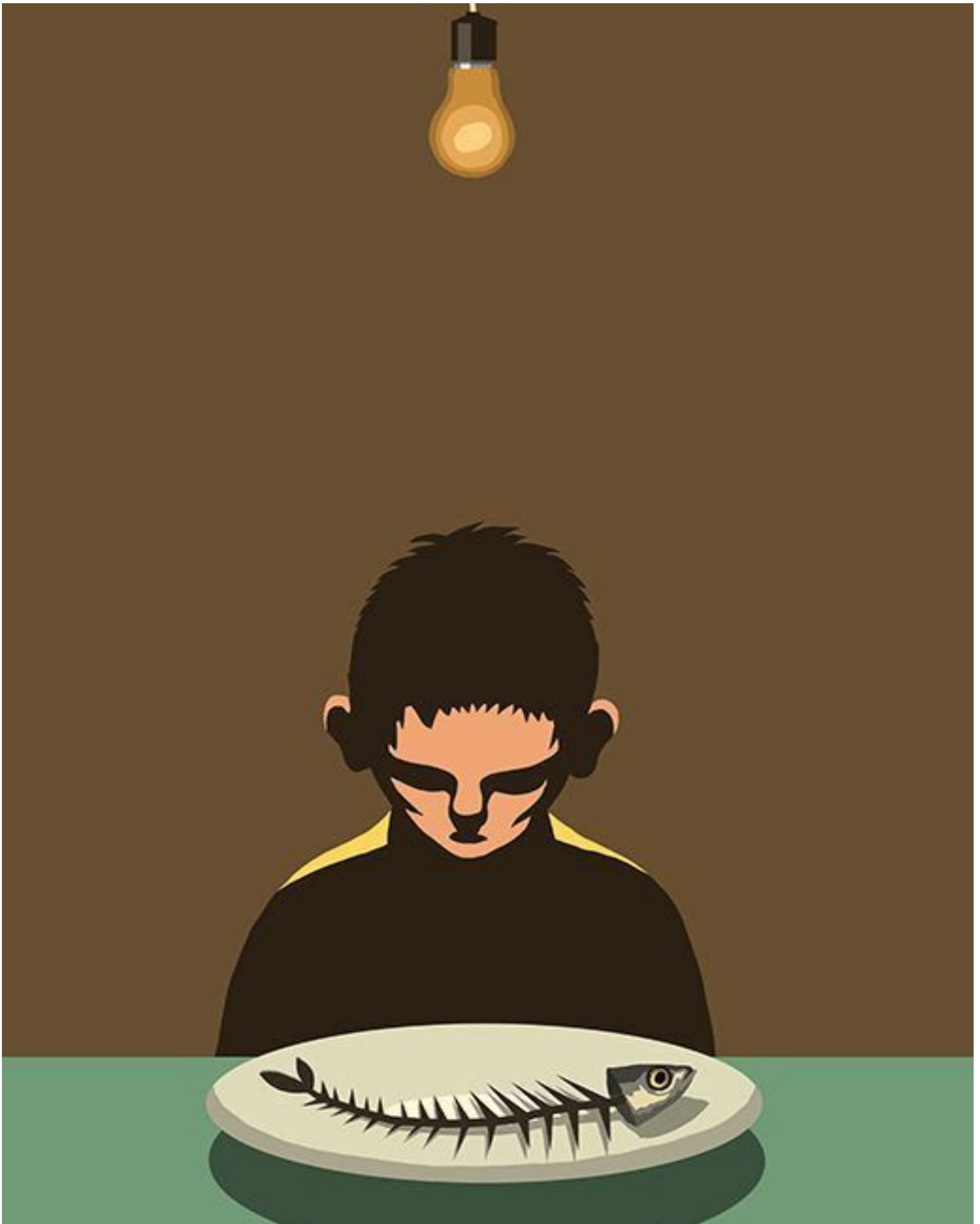
Illustration from [Crown of Life Press](#)

During his time in Bristol, he noticed the numerous unfed and unhoused children living in the streets or poorly-run state houses and opened an orphanage. His leadership of the orphanage is marked by his complete trust and faith in the Lord's provision.

One anecdote describes a morning when 300 children were waiting for breakfast before going to school. George went to a quiet room and prayed. A moment later, a baker knocked on the door and told the housekeeper that he couldn't sleep. He felt he needed to make bread for the orphanage and provided three batches of bread. The next moment, a milkman knocked on the door, explaining that his cart had broken down and didn't want milk to spoil.

By Müller's faith and the Lord's grace, those 300 children were sent to school with full stomachs.

George Müller died at the age of 93, after a providential life of service and prayer.



Leonard Beard, *Poverty*

St. Paul's Anglican Church

"When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed."

St. Teresa of Calcutta

We are about to tell you about the faithfulness of Anglicans in justice and mercy work. Mother Teresa's words above hit hard. What do we do with the "neither you nor I wanted" language? Her prophetic voice echoes John's clarity in the scripture below. These are not easy topics, but we are called to wrestle with the discomfort. And the Holy Spirit promises to companion and guide.

"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

1 John 3:17-18

When we think of hunger, we often think of large cities and rural communities. But, the reality is that hunger exists nearly everywhere, even in thriving small towns. Some have known hunger their entire lives; for others, it is a new and often scary experience.

Imagine being food insecure, unable to feed your family. Where would you turn? Who would support you?

DAY 14 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

In Summerville, South Carolina, a small town of about 50,000 residents, the food insecurity rate hovers near 9%, technically less than 10% but consider how those numbers translate into a face, a name, a story. Years ago, the historic St. Paul's Anglican Church wanted to better love their neighbors. For them, that tangible love meant bridging the gap in the community by providing meals for families.

Today, that means serving more than 1,100 families each year. But, ultimately their ministry is not simply providing food, diapers, and clothing; **it's about seeing their neighbors and creating a vibrant, welcoming environment that meets both tangible needs and builds long-term gospel-centered relationships.**

As many ministries have found, word gets out once you become a place of shalom. People are attracted to the love of Jesus. They come and they bring others. When St. Paul's realized they needed to grow their capacity to keep up, they applied for a Matthew 25 Initiative Grant.

Food distribution ministries need constant refreshing and updating so as to be places of shalom and not places of shame which can so easily happen. The gospel methods of relational investment, such as authentic friendship, make all the difference.

At the Matthew 25 Initiative, we create pathways for Christ-centered ministries to receive the financial aid they need to share the Gospel of God's grace and meet the real human needs of the poor and vulnerable. It has been an honor partnering with St. Paul's as they see, love, and serve their neighbors.

Hunger can exist in surprising places. Yet, where there is a church, there is a mandate to nourish, both spiritually and physically.

Food Insecurity + Dignity

*He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.*

The Magnificat, Luke 1:52-53

There is a certain irony in thinking of fasting as sharing our food, is there not? Essentially, God says to his people: I want you to engage in true fasting by sharing food with people who aren't eating... not because they are also fasting, but because they have no food from which to fast. Being hungry is having that choice taken from you by circumstances.

In Mary's song of worship that she sings after visiting Elizabeth, she praises God for filling the hungry with good things, but says he has sent the rich away empty. God wants to fill up the hungry, and he wants us to be his hands and feet to do so.

Many of us probably spend a lot of time and money each week keeping our bodies healthy. We buy healthy groceries, we meal prep, we take vitamins and supplements, we exercise, we take our children to their well check visits, and so on. These are good, life-giving tasks, and we are meant to care for our bodies. After all, we are God's beloved creation, made in his image, and Christ himself took on flesh in order to become one of us.

But those who live with food insecurity are no different. They too are made in God's image, and they want to care for their bodies and their loved ones. They want the dignity of a choice to fast, just as we do.

And in fact, there is no "they" in this scenario. We are all interconnected and intertwined, and our own flourishing depends on the flourishing of us all.

"The starving poor sat down to a banquet" – will you help lay the table? Will you carry those who are hungry, whose bellies are empty?

Sharing the Loaves and Fishes ⁵

Sharing the loaves and fishes,
You gave us an image of solidarity with the hungry, O Lord.
Sharing yourself in the bread and wine,
You called all to the table, O Lord.
Give me the hunger to be a part of the feeding
And the healing of this world.
Nourish me with your Grace,
So I may work with joy to serve your children.
Open my eyes and my heart
To recognize those in poverty
And increase my awareness
Of the structures and systems
That need to be changed
So we may all break bread together.
In your name we pray for the end of hunger.
Amen.

Scripture + A New Hunger

And if you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

Isaiah 58:10

We are doing two things today: nourishing our souls with scripture and choosing an embodied, imaginative prayer exercise.

Take a moment to slow down and read the verse on the next page. This is what God's word explicitly says about hunger. To see some of the verses collected together tells the story of God's heart.



Wedding Feast of the Lamb, by Sheridan Waldrop

DAY 16 | PRAYER

But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink.

Romans 12:20

To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless.

1 Corinthians 4:11

I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

2 Corinthians 11:27

*Men do not despise a thief if he steals
To satisfy himself when he is hungry.*

Proverbs 6:30

For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in.

Matthew 25:35

[On that great day] they will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat.

Revelation 7:16

DAY 16 | PRAYER

Most of us reading this do not suffer from food scarcity or inaccessibility to nutritious food. We hold our abundance while laying down one “G” and picking up two “G’s.” We lay down guilt that leads nowhere. We pickup gratitude and generosity with conviction...

Our Saturday practice in our series is to bring the topic of the week into conversation with God. Around this particular topic, we want to suggest a focused engagement around the Lenten tradition of fasting, possibly in ways that you have before or in ways that might be new. But the focus is that of intercession and enacting the conversation with God. We offer four ideas below. Consider options like these to engage creatively in prayer:

Fast from eating mindlessly or quickly.

Dedicate a series of meals to taking every bite slowly. Savor the textures and flavors and smells. And with each bite pray through some of the reflections and awareness from this week. Pray around the verses above. Thank God for contemplative activists who give themselves to the repetitive work of meal requisition and meal preparation and meal sharing.

Fast for a week from using a credit card for food and beverage purchases.

Retrieve cash and manage its use during the week as an act of solidarity with those who live below the poverty line and function paycheck to paycheck, forced to live in a cash based world. Allow it to prompt you in prayer for M25i ministries like New Garden Farm in North Carolina and Living Edge in Victoria, Canada who are offering fresh food and produce that isn't canned or processed.

DAY 16 | PRAYER

Fast a meal or two such that you feel hunger, and brain fog, and the irritability that comes with your body not being able to function well.

Allow all those multiple moments of awareness to cause you to pray for children in schools who rely on school meals to function academically. And pray for those on the streets who might struggle to problem solve. Pray for the single mothers who, in stress, are choosing to buy fast food so that she can pay for heating in her apartment for this month.

Fast for a meal, and during that time of the day, seek out the honor of serving food.

Go to food kitchen that offers the possibility of conversations and relational engagement among those enjoying the meal. We see it as not a chance to pat ourselves on the back because we “did a good deed,” but as an opportunity to be near Christ, to gaze at the face of someone imprinted with God’s image who can’t access a cooked meal easily, to listen to the voice of someone whose challenges might be very different than ours, and who might be able to teach us about our own different forms of hunger.

Whether you choose one of these fasting ideas or a different one, consider this being the week that you engage in almsgiving as well, to embrace the full triad of Lenten practices.

1. You have prayed in intercession.
2. You have fasted in solidarity.
3. And now you invite your heart to follow your finances.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Matthew 6:21

Homelessness

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Isaiah 58: 6,8

Scripture is direct and clear.

Continuing on in our passage from Isaiah 58 this week, we see that in addition to sharing their food with the hungry, God says to his people, “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: is it not to share your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter?” These two mandates are spoken in the same breath, expressing the same heart of God, which makes sense; food insecurity and homelessness often go hand-in-hand.

Homelessness can seem overwhelming when we think about how we can help. Providing “the poor wanderer with shelter” might feel much more complex than sharing our food or clothing. But God’s heart is for his people to have a home – all people, all whom he created in his image and therefore imbued with dignity.

He brought Abraham and Sarah into the place he had for them; he brought the Israelites back home again after their desert wanderings, and he brought them home once more after the exile. Putting down roots, stability, and a place to build a life: all these things matter to God, because he knows they are key to human dignity and flourishing. Home matters.



The painting (yes, painting!) you see above is called *Clearance*, by James Earley. Earley paints people who are experiencing homelessness as a way to bring dignity to his subjects, and to raise awareness of homelessness. If you zoom in to look at the white detail on the man's jacket, you will see a barcode, representing the idea that this man could be for treated as an object on clearance sale. Under the barcode, it says "Mt 25:35-40."

It's crucial that we see people experiencing homelessness as, first of all, just that: **people**, just like you and me. We are not as many steps away from homelessness as we might think. In fact, the biggest cause of people experiencing homelessness today is actually a "catastrophic loss of family." Many of us have probably experienced the loss of a job and used up our savings, or had to borrow money for a deposit on an apartment. In those times, we had biological family, spiritual family, or good friends to help us out. People experiencing homelessness often don't have that safety net, and that is the primary difference.

DAY 17

What about addiction and mental illness? Again, the safety net of a family, spiritual or biological, plays an enormous role. Addiction and mental illness happens to people of all socio-economic spheres, but it's the ones without the social safety net who end up experiencing homelessness most of the time. That means most people experiencing homelessness are very alone in the world.

But God's heart is that no one would be alone. He tells us to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, so how can we be part of ending homelessness or shortening homelessness? How can we be part of preventing it in the first place?

“And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'”

Matthew 8:20

It is believed that Jesus himself was actually homeless as an adult. He did not own real estate. Did he ever rent a home? Scripture never mentions that he had a home of his own, but makes many references to the times he slept in other people's homes. He wasn't on the streets; he had a safety net of family and friends, even some strangers, who took him in and provided a roof over his head. Matthew 8 is explicit about Jesus' homelessness.

DAY 17

What does that mean for us today? It means that Jesus is very near to those experiencing homelessness. It means that he knows what it is like to wake up in the morning, and not be certain sometimes where he will lay his head that night. It means that when we draw near to those experiencing homelessness, we draw near to Christ. It means “that Jesus counts himself among the least of these. When we care for the poor, it is as if we care for our Lord himself.”⁶

This week we will learn more about homelessness and the ways that we can participate in caring for those without shelter – and participate in true fasting – not only this Lent, but for the whole of our lives.

“If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you.”

Leviticus 25:35-36

Homelessness

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room.'"

Matthew 25:34,35

Homelessness is a complex issue. Like a spider's web, it is made up of numerous, intricately woven threads in which victims will find themselves entangled, whether for a moment or a lifetime. These threads are easy to overlook unless one views them from the proper angles. Otherwise, all one sees are those unfortunate enough to be stuck in the web.

In this post, we will give attention to the complexity of homelessness by focusing on a few different "threads:" youth, families, and veterans who experience both short-term and chronic homelessness.

To start with an overview:

- On a single night in January 2023, **about 653,000 people were experiencing homelessness in the US**, according to the Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. This number includes both sheltered and unsheltered people.
- **In Canada, between 25,000 and 35,000 people are homeless on any given night.** 38% of homeless people in Canada are women. 30% of Canadian homeless come from Indigenous communities.
- Although it is difficult to produce an exact number for homelessness in Mexico, the Borgen Project estimates that it is in the millions.

DAY 18 | LEAN IN AND LEARN



In M25i we are very careful about images and photos, seeking to honor and respect at every turn. Above is another realist painting by James Earley, the artist from yesterday's post. Earley desires to bring dignity to his subjects and raise awareness of homelessness through his work. The title of this painting comes from the sign in the shop window: "La Vie est Belle," which means, "Life is beautiful."

Unaccompanied youth made up 22% of the people under the age of 25 experiencing homelessness in the US in 2023.

- 50,000 youth sleep on the streets for six months or more each year.
- About one-quarter of youth experience homelessness within a year of aging out of the foster care system.
- Insufficient academic support leads to not completing a high school degree, and increases a teenager's chances of becoming homeless 3.5 times.

DAY 18 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

In Mexico, child poverty and displacement are widespread. In Mexico City alone, it is estimated that about 15,00 children live on the streets. Many factors contribute to youth homelessness, like family conflict or abandonment, domestic violence, poor child welfare programs, and residential instability. This is the case for the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

Speaking of families:

- 57,563 family households were experiencing poverty on a single night in the US in 2023, with an average family size of 3.2 people.
- About 91% of these households were sheltered, with the remaining 9% sleeping in locations like cars, abandoned buildings, and outdoors.
- The causes of family homelessness are similar to those listed for the other categories. With many of these families headed by single moms, they struggle to make enough income to afford housing.
- Many single parent homes experience cyclical or periodic homelessness, are provisionally accommodated, or stay in emergency shelters due to domestic violence or natural disaster.

“To save a life is a real and beautiful thing. To make a home for the homeless, yes, it is a thing that must be good; whatever the world may say, it cannot be wrong.”

Vincent Van Gogh

DAY 18 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

Veterans also make up a significant number of individual adults who experience homelessness in the US, with 22 in 10,000 veterans experiencing homelessness in 2023. This is about a 7% increase from 2022.

- Veterans face numerous obstacles that place them at higher risk of experiencing homelessness. Many struggles to find a job due to injuries and PTSD.
- Only 36 rental homes are affordable and available for every 100 extremely low-income renter households in the U.S. according to reports in 2022. Consequently, even Veterans who receive housing vouchers have difficulty using them in high-cost regions with housing shortages.
- In Canada, according to Employment and Social Development Canada, veterans made up 4.4% of individuals experiencing homelessness in 2018.
- Texas, in 2023, registered one of the largest jumps nationwide with a 19% increase in Texas veterans experiencing homelessness, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Each person experiencing homelessness, whether visible or invisible to us, carries with them the immense hardships and obstacles that brought them to that point.

Yet, despite their burdens, many of our homeless friends choose to see the light and joy in their lives. Many are followers of Christ. These individuals do not choose to be tangled in the web of homelessness.

May we approach each individual who experiences homelessness with a posture of respect for the battles they fight, and humility to hold their story with care.

Dorothy Day

"We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and dear God — please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend."

Dorothy Day

Dorothy Day was a powerhouse of a journalist and contemplative activist whose life was devoted to prayer, and she took her conversations with God to the streets. Her cultivated awareness of God's love, presence, and filling enabled her to walk as a remarkable icon of Christ's light to countless others. Dorothy continues to inspire Christians of all backgrounds to live out Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 25.

Dorothy was born in 1897 in Brooklyn, New York, but her family moved to San Francisco, then Chicago, and back to New York by the time she was 18 years old. Her parents highly valued education while also struggling to find financial security and having survived the devastating earthquake of 1906 in California. Dorothy enrolled at the University of Illinois at age 16, and began to work at a newspaper alongside labor organizers and other freethinkers at age 18. By this point, she had rejected organized religion, because of the ways she felt it failed to care for the destitute.

"I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least."

"The Gospel takes away our right forever, to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor."

DAY 19 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST



Icon: "Dorothy Day and The Holy Family of the Streets" by Kelly Latimore

A few years later, she converted to Catholicism with profound sincerity as she was drawn to the beauty of the life of Jesus, and began writing for a Catholic magazine. Soon after, Dorothy met Peter Maurin, a French visionary with whom she would go on to co-found the trailblazing Catholic Workers Movement and newspaper to offer a vision of "a society in which it is easier for people to be good." Because of her own story, and as a single mother, she signed protests against legalizing abortion and famously stated "make room for children; don't do away with them." Motherhood significantly shaped her worldview. Her formal ministry to the poor began a few years into the Great Depression when structures that had previously been dependable fell apart.

"If you are rushed for time, sow time and you will reap time. Go to church and spend a quiet hour in prayer. You will have more time than ever and your work will get done. Sow time with the poor. Sit and listen to them, give them your time lavishly. You will reap time a hundredfold."

DAY 19 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST

Dorothy used her gift of writing to build the Catholic Worker into a wide community of laborers and intellectuals alike who shared her and Peter's vision for a sacramental, justice-dedicated society. The Catholic Worker Movement opened houses of hospitality to the unhoused people of New York, which offered resources and shelter. The movement served people in a plethora of vulnerable situations, but consistently prioritized hospitality to the chronically and temporarily homeless. Within a few years, there were thirty-two hospitality houses, from Buffalo and Baltimore to St. Louis and Seattle. A central principle of the Catholic Worker movement was the workers' deliberate, voluntary choice to live simply alongside the poor.

Dorothy had a deep respect for the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, the Gospels, and Paul's epistles. She aimed to model her life after Jesus' in her dedication to peacemaking and full-bodied, on-the-streets witness. She, like many Biblical models of the faith and saints in church history, lived an untidy life, but the fragrance of Jesus was caught by those who encountered her. Dorothy Day focused her desire to see a healed world into Christ-centered action that resulted in long-lasting communities of visionaries like her.

"A custom existed among the first generations of Christians, when faith was a bright fire that warmed more than those who kept it burning. In every house then a room was kept ready for any stranger who might ask for shelter; it was even called "the stranger's room."

Not because these people thought they could trace something of someone they loved in the stranger who used it, not because the man or woman to whom they gave shelter reminded them of Christ, but because—plain and simple and stupendous fact—he or she was Christ."

"Those who cannot see Christ in the poor are atheists indeed."

"My strength returns to me with my cup of coffee and the reading of the Psalms."

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Luke 10:33-37

Advocate Befrienders

"Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more."

H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

The second law of thermodynamics is often used to describe the natural deterioration of the state of our world. Things tend towards disorder and greater randomness. We age, and our bodies break down. Relationships can drift. Our homes and neighborhoods age and lose vitality. As we understand the story of scripture, the world began falling apart in Genesis 3. Shalom was cracked, and we live under the weight of individual and generational choices that have led to a society that feels like it is always falling apart.

As followers of Christ we are called to contend for shalom in these contexts of brokenness. Today, many of our parishes in the ACNA have chosen urban settings and to not pull back from suffering, to live parish life in neighborhoods, for example, alongside unhoused neighbors. For them "location, location, location" does not mean places of greatest visibility or easy access to the affluent. It means a missiology focused on loving "the least of these" – not just on Sundays, but as neighbors, every day of the week.

"It's criminal to ignore a neighbor in need, but compassion for the poor - what a blessing!"

Proverbs 14:21

DAY 20 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

Matt Lindell is the Grant Director for the Matthew 25i Initiative. Recently, he traveled to Austin, TX, and stayed in the downtown area, a few blocks from Christ Church Anglican. Part of his assignment was to interview Assoc. Rector Matt Dampier, who has been a present and loving advocate for those “sleeping rough” in the parish community. Without a car, and too close to order an Uber, Matt walked the streets to the church. Blocks of makeshift tents, loud music, conversations, foul language, trash, and pain. These are the neighbors and friends of Fr. Matt and the ministry team from the church which has had a long standing story of faithful service and love for those experiencing homelessness. .



Home, by Amber Eldredge

DAY 20 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

Nearly 100 chronically homeless neighbors live within a three-block radius of Christ Church of Austin. For the past three years, Fr. Matt has led a team of about 20 people called "Advocate Befrienders" into friendship with those on the streets. The goal has been to walk with people from street life into Jesus-centered community and housing, through friendship. They are a ministry of proximity and presence. It's been said that "attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity" (Simone Weil), and this group engages their neighbors through friendship and interest. As friends would do, they then walk with, advocate for, and help.

Christ Church partners with two strong nonprofits that offer both worship under I-35 highway bridge and another one that provides housing and community for friends who once struggled to survive on the streets of Austin. "Advocate Befrienders" do the work bridging the space between these non-profits to build a team of a handful of parishioners who companion one person experiencing homelessness towards getting their paperwork in order, helping them reconnect with biological family, and supporting them if they had mental health and medical needs. Most of all, the significant factor that offers the greatest change is welcoming them into the community of Christ Church Anglican where they are seen, prayed for, receive the Eucharist, and where their stories can be known and held in love.

What does it look like for us as Christ-followers to engage and befriend our unhoused neighbors? What does it look like for our parishes to intentionally walk with and alongside the marginalized and unseen? While there are few easy answers to the tensions we feel, we can engage and love those we see. But to see we have to be near enough for our hearts to be formed and resistances to be removed as the suffering of others becomes our own in incarnational love.

Visit [Advocate Befrienders](#) on the M25i website to learn more.

Homelessness + Dignity

“Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn’t help?’ He will answer them, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.’”

Matt 25:44-45

Last Friday, we focused on the connection between food insecurity and dignity. Today, we want to emphasize the connection between homelessness and dignity. And even in our language we shift to housing insecurity, and most who experience homelessness live on the edge of stability receiving subsidized housing support or renting that provides very little security. It is too easy for most of us to “other” those who struggle with chronic homelessness. As soon as we do that, we are putting a wall between “us” and “them.” In truth, we are objectifying them – which means to treat someone as an object, rather than as a human being.

Martin Buber, a respected Jewish theologian and philosopher, described God's invitation to engage others in an "I-Thou" relationship as opposed to "I-It," beholding each person with respect and wonder. When we treat someone like an object, on engage in "I-It" relationships with other men and women, we can mentally dismiss them or hide them away when we don't want to think about them anymore. Heaven forbid we think of God-imaged individuals as an object to hide away.

DAY 21

Additionally, many live precariously in our midst when it comes to housing stability. Not Alone Ministries, which we highlighted two weeks ago, companions single mothers, most of whom would be considered in the demographic of middle class; however, many hover right above the poverty line, and slip below it quickly. Not one of the single mothers supported by Not Alone has "moved up" when changing homes. So far, it has always been a "move down" and often into rental homes in unsafe contexts or the homes themselves are unsafe. It does not take much to then "move down" from there. Some of our parishioner friends who were formerly homeless can speak to the grueling work to stay ahead of rent payments, and one small emergency can land them back in a shelter or in temporary housing.

As we've acknowledged this week, homelessness is complex. On Monday, we discussed the "catastrophic loss of family" as the root cause of most homelessness. But that loss often happens gradually, and the path to becoming an unhoused person is usually winding and indirect – a slow descent into a place that someone never intended to end up. And both scripture and church history speak to the often more powerful force that is spiritual family over and above biological family. How can we be a more robust family to each other in the fabric of common humanity and catching those who are fragile?

DAY 21

Figure 1
Housing continuum



Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2018.

The graphic above of “the housing continuum,” created by the Canadian government, is thought-provoking because it illustrates the wide spectrum that exists between homelessness, housing insecurity, and purchasing a home at market value. For most people, home ownership remains a major goal of adulthood, but is increasingly out of reach even for those who have grown up with resources. Without the boost of those resources, it becomes a complete impossibility. This graphic makes clear that there are very many steps between homelessness and market value home ownership.

The good news is that each of these types of housing represents an opportunity for intervention and a reversal of circumstances – helping someone move to the right, instead of to the left, on the continuum. We also believe that the power of Christ's love to fill a home, regardless of where it lands on this spectrum, can transform the quality of life under each roof. Even temporary or emergency shelters can be a place of light and life and hope because Jesus followers come near. So we make every effort to be the gospel, share the gospel, and live the gospel in both word and deed. Christ, the light of the world, desires to enter every dwelling, our own in fresh ways and in the lives of those who live vulnerably fragile longing for comfort and home.

For those Experiencing Homelessness

Every Saturday of Lent is dedicated to bringing these complex problems of our times to God, because they are so much bigger than our minds and hearts can hold. And rather than disengage, become calloused, or despair, we choose action in prayer.

Here is a communal prayer that was written for a parish to pray together. A small group or a bible study can dedicate time to learning about these topics using this week's content and conclude by praying this together. Save this to share with your parish leaders.

As most of us are reading this on our own, we recommend reading and praying this aloud. Extend your hands imaginatively over those for whom you are praying, and then speak out the response by opening your hands before the Lord in a receiving posture. If there is a phrase or a sentence that stands out, copy it down and put it up on your fridge or computer pad to remind you to pray again.

A Litany for those Experiencing Homelessness

Written by Simon Kenyon and Bill Walker III, adapted from the Good Sam Institute

Holy God, we pray for [local ministries] and other churches engaged in witnessing and serving the homeless community. Anoint them to be faithful witnesses to Christ and His mercy. Grant them wisdom to know how to effectively befriend and help each individual they come into relationship with.

In your mercy, Lord;

Hear our prayer.

For those living on the streets, whatever the cause, whether family breakdown, addiction, loss of work, rebellion, mental illness, disability, or housing costs, Lord would you intervene and bring healing. Grant the gracious gift of repentance where needed, provide jobs for those seeking work, provide healing in broken families, and provide professional help for the mentally ill.

In your mercy, Lord;

Hear our prayer.

Lord redeem the hearts and futures of those lost and without hope on the streets. Give them the hope of eternal life, and the saving beauty of divine friendship. Grant them also strong and godly relationships.

In your mercy, Lord;

Hear our prayer.

For families broken because they could not afford to pay the rent; for those who have no relatives or friends who can take them in.

In your mercy, Lord;
Hear our prayer.

For the vulnerable on the streets, we ask that you grant them physical protection. Particularly we lift up the women and the young, so often exploited and traumatized. Be their protector Lord.

In your mercy, Lord;
Hear our prayer.

Grant your people the grace to see beyond surface characteristics of those living on the streets, to see their heart and the image of Christ in them. Give us also the courage to be faithful witnesses of your Gospel, and to overcome our own discomfort when interacting with people outside of our own culture and comfort zone.

In your mercy, Lord;
Hear our prayer.

Creation Care

*The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.*

Isaiah 58:10-11

Today, we get to soak in Scripture that tells a story. In the middle of this beautiful Isaiah 58 True Fasting passage, the prophet pauses to describe God's vision for all of us as we pour ourselves out for the vulnerable. His description is dramatic and physical. He speaks hope where there is despair and brokenness of "a sun-scorched land." Our frame, our bodies, will be strengthened? We might get to be like well-watered gardens? What?! Like a spring whose waters never fail? That could be us? Yes, that could be us as we step more fully into this kingdom of God that contends for the flourishing of all.

God never leaves us to ourselves to figure out his ways. He is kindly holding our hands and describes what shalom is and what not-shalom is. He is realistic and the writers of scripture are writing out of grit, famine, war, death, droughts, oppression. Never will the words of biblical hope be coming from a pollyanna lens that doesn't account for real suffering and a world that is very seriously broken.

DAY 23

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all.

Job 12:7-9

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

Psalms 26:11-12

Cared-for creation and even damaged creation, is speaking of God's love and ways all the time, revealing something about him and his methods that he so beautifully embedded in the code of the natural world.

God's call to us in Genesis is to: Tend it. Watch over it. These are words associated with nurture and cultivation, gardening, concern and protection. God does want us to care for his creation.

DAY 23

The earth mourns and dries up, and the land wastes away and withers. Even the greatest people on earth waste away.

The earth suffers for the sins of its people, for they have twisted God's instructions, violated his laws, and broken his everlasting covenant.

Isaiah 24:4-5

Isaiah 24:5, above, says that the earth suffers for the sins of its people. Rather than caring for God's creation as he has asked us to do, we have sinned in ways that cause the earth to suffer. This language is direct and convicting.

You may be wondering what creation care has to do with the vulnerable, the marginalized, the poor. They are all connected, and this week, we will explore and learn more about those connections. To give you a sneak preview, consider this:

- The people of Flint, Michigan, without clean drinking water
- Those who were left homeless after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans
- Monocultural over-farming of the US Great Plains, which caused the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and created 2.5 million displaced migrants

When the earth suffers, it causes God's human creation to suffer, too. Read the passage from Romans 8 below, and consider what it might mean for all creation to look forward to freedom from death and decay.

DAY 23

"For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse.

But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

Romans 8:19-22

When God created the world, he created a fabric of life and thriving where humans, men and women, lived in a shalom-relationship with land, sea, sky, forests, and all animals from tiny to huge. The natural created world nurtures us back by giving us water and food, shade and sunlight and oxygen. God's vision of shalom is for all his creation to flourish in mutuality and for not one part to suffer, whether human or natural.

His magnum opus, women and men who image his character, are meant to contend for this vision. His people, the church, are called to hold this vision high and to work diligently toward it for the glory of God.

Creation Care

"For six years you are to plant and harvest crops on your land. Then during the seventh year, do not plow or plant your land. If any food grows there, allow the poor to have it. And let the wild animals eat what is left. You should do the same with your vineyards and your orchards of olive trees"

Exodus 23:10-11

What does creation care have to do with the vulnerable?

Broken creation care affects people's lives in many negative ways. This passage in Exodus reveals biblical ethics that takes into account the fact that even in a pre-industrial agricultural society, creation depletes, gets damaged, and must be tended and allowed to renew. Additionally, in the blueprint for society that God gives his people, there is also intentional and proactive care for the poor. The impact of creation groaning (Romans 8), in our times, reaches so much further.

It is clear to all that natural disasters and extreme weather disproportionately impact the poor and most vulnerable. These effects include internal displacement, food and water insecurity, global health crises, and economic inequality. These populations are often forced to live in areas with high pollution and-or poor infrastructure that leave them vulnerable to property damage, illnesses, food insecurity, and other issues that result from inequity in the face of natural disasters.

"The Lord's love fills the earth.

The sky was made at the Lord's command.

By the breath from his mouth, he made all the stars."

Psalms 33:5-6

DAY 24 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

A study on poverty and disasters in the US conducted by the University of Colorado found that people of low socioeconomic status are at greater risk of hazards and damage due to the poor construction of the low-income housing units they occupy. Greater risk of fires, of exposure to hazardous materials, degradation of building products that are old and need refurbishing become common.

Now think about those experiencing homelessness whose wages are insufficient to afford them stable and safe housing. Where are they to go in the face of disaster, and how are they to get there? Hard freezes and extreme heat compromises their ability to thrive as they have no shield from debilitating conditions.

Chemical degradation is the dominant cause of soil-degradation in Mexico. Soil degradation is one of the major threats to ecosystem conservation worldwide, because it reduces the soil potential for food production and leads to desertification and soil erosion. The loss of soil fertility reduces the ability to grow crops, and over time only the wealthy are able to access high quality produce.

Let's talk about flood zones. Years of research and evidence from storms have highlighted social inequalities in areas with a high risk of flooding. Moreover, we have less understanding of the social and demographic composition of communities that experience flood impacts outside of flood zones.

Ministries like [Austin Disaster Relief Network](#) in Austin, Texas, respond to flood (and other) disasters and offer "physical, emotional, and spiritual support to disaster survivors to meet short and long-term needs." [Anglican Relief and Development Fund](#), our partner organization, responds with relief care for all of North America. Imagine what might be possible if churches stepped into prevention of these kinds of vulnerabilities to disaster.

"God intends... our care of Creation to reflect our love for the Creator."

John Stott



Night Prayer, by [Michael Cook](#)

To offer hope: in Canada, Christians are engaged in habitat restoration which is an "intentional activity that initiates or accelerates the recovery of an ecosystem related to its health, stability and sustainability."

Restoration activities can include:

- Control of introduced, invasive species of plants or animals.
- Assisted re-vegetation/re-establishment of native species.
- Control, reduction or elimination of specific adverse impacts such as polluted run-off.
- Re-establishment and/or increasing complexity of habitat structures including physical, biological or chemical composition. This may include acts like the addition of in-stream wood and rocks, or moving the stream altogether.

DAY 24 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

Churches and communities such as small groups can get involved in this work in each city or town. There is a restoration for the common good that Christians have always been a part of. But even on the property of a parish this work can happen (e.g. growing gardens, removing invasive species, planting pollinators), so it can be a both-and effort.

Some ideas of what you could do:

- Care for one's own place of worship...
- Reach out and care for every part of our communities that may or may not know that their land – and their souls – need the life and light of the Creator.
- Work toward healing and mending the place and space in which we all live.
- Consider our hearts and minds with tangible gospel practices.

Christian organizations like [A ROCHA](#) help followers of Christ engage these topics faithfully.

As followers of Jesus, we embrace and act responsibly to care for God's earth while we reaffirm the important truth that we worship only the Creator and not the creation. Christians acknowledge creation care as an act of discipleship; we are stewards of the earth, summoned by God to “work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15).

"Our uses of the earth must be designed to conserve and renew it rather than to deplete or destroy it. We pay special attention to protecting human health and protecting the most vulnerable."

National Association of Evangelicals

St. Francis of Assisi

“At all times and seasons, in every country and place, every day and all day, we must have a true and humble faith.”

St. Francis

Our contemplative activist this week is none other than the patron saint of ecology, animals, and merchants: St. Francis of Assisi.

St Francis is remembered for his bond with Creation and for going from riches to rags in true upside-down kingdom fashion.

Brother Thomas of Celano, Francis’ disciple and first biographer, wrote: “St. Francis praised the Artist in every one of his works; whatever he found in things made, he referred to their Maker. He rejoiced in all the works of the Lord’s hands, and with joyful vision saw into the reason and cause that gave them life. In beautiful things he came to know Beauty itself. To him all things were good. They cried out to him, ‘He who made us is infinitely good.’ By tracing His footprints in things, Francis followed the Beloved wherever He led. He made from created things, a ladder to His throne.”

Born in 1226 in Assisi, Italy, Francis grew up in a wealthy family. His father was a successful cloth merchant and his mother a lady. As a young man, everyone loved Francis—he was charming, charismatic, and a natural leader of his peers in their “worldly” exploits.

His father planned to train his son in his merchant ways, but Francis wanted the glory and prestige of a knight. His time came when Assisi declared war on a neighboring town. Not long into the war, however, he was taken prisoner and remained in prison for a full year. He subsequently attempted to join the papal forces under Count Gentile against the emperor Frederick II in Apulia in late 1205.

DAY 25 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST

This is when Francis had his first encounter with God. On his way to join the war, he had a vision of God calling him to return home and become a different kind of knight. He was greeted with disdain and accusations of cowardice, but he was resolved to follow the Lord's calling.

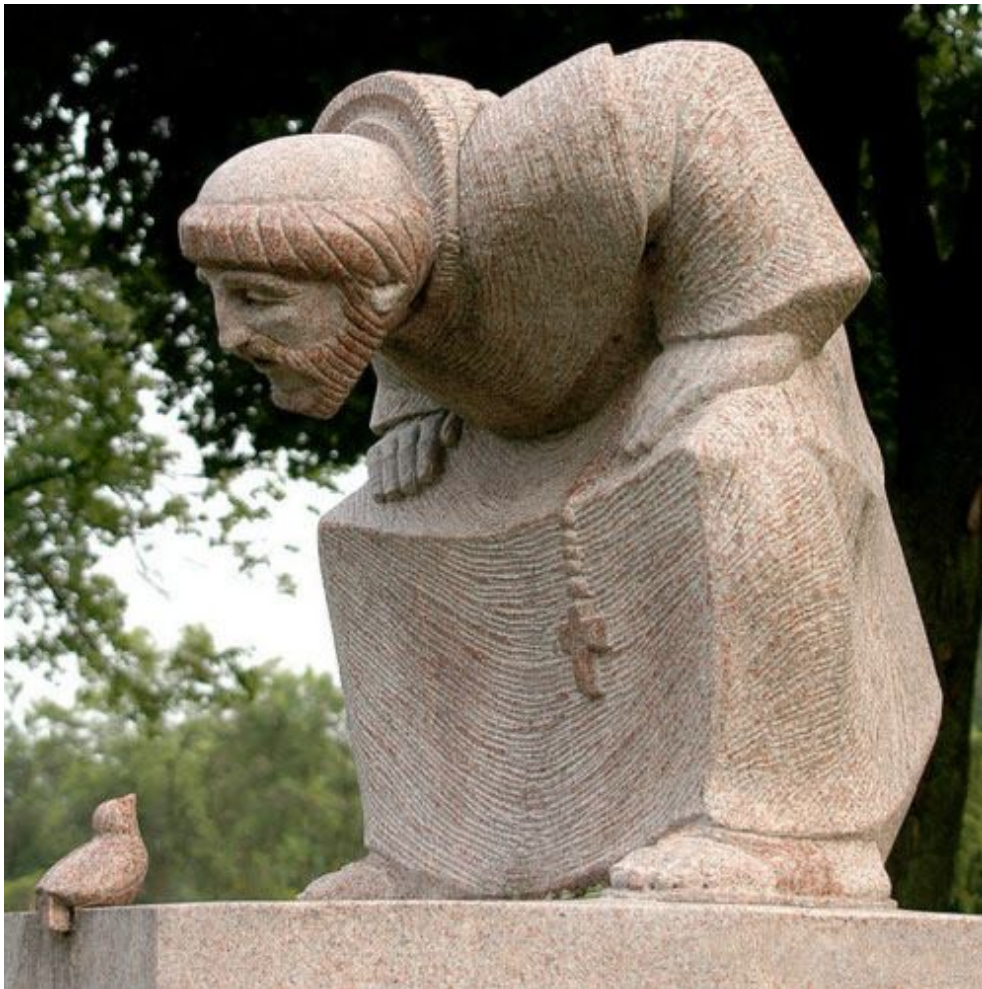
“He came to a spot where a large flock of birds of various kinds had come together. When God's saint saw them, he quickly ran to the spot and greeted them as if they were endowed with reason....

He went right up to them and solicitously urged them to listen to the word of God, saying, ‘Oh birds, my brothers and sisters, you have a great obligation to praise your Creator, who clothed you in feathers and gave you wings to fly with, provided you with pure air and cares for you without any worry on your part.’... The birds showed their joy in a remarkable fashion: They began to stretch their necks, extend their wings, open their beaks and gaze at him attentively.

He went through their midst with amazing fervor of spirit, brushing against them with his tunic. Yet none of them moved from the spot until the man of God made the sign of the cross and gave them permission to leave; then they all flew away together. His companions waiting on the road saw all these things. When he returned to them, that pure and simple man began to accuse himself of negligence because he had not preached to the birds before.”

St Bonaventure, *The Life of St Francis*

DAY 25 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST



*God's Fool ~ St. Francis of Assisi, by sculptor Frank C. Gaylord
Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery; Naperville, Illinois*

Another significant moment in Francis' conversion was while he was praying at an ancient, crumbling church at San Damiano. He heard Christ say, "Repair my church." Taking this literally, Francis stole fabric from his father to sell for money to repair the San Damiano church building. His father caught him and brought him before the religious authorities, who told him to return the money. Ever one for commitment, Francis tore all his clothes off but his undershirt and ran into the forest singing. Most saints and heroes of the faith have untidy stories, and some make us smile.

DAY 25 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST

Francis now lived on his own in poverty, slowly repairing the old church. Others started to join him, attracted by his (literally) stripped-down way of life. His brotherhood was marked by their simple rule of life and heart for the poorest of the poor. A community of women also emerged called The Poor Clares. St Francis believed that poverty strengthened his faith as it removed barriers between him and worshipping God.

St. Francis felt a deep connection with creation, calling all animals “brother” and “sister,” as we see in the story of preaching to the birds, described in St. Bonaventure's 1260 AD biography.

Another story recounts St Francis befriending a wolf that had been terrorizing a nearby village, saying "Brother Wolf, I make peace with thee." And the wolf is said to have become a tame part of the community, fed and beloved, and mourned when he died of old age. This story reminds us of scripture, where the redeemed and renewed creation is described by the relationship among animals:

"The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them"

Isaiah 11:6

DAY 25 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST

When St Francis began to go blind, he wrote the Canticle of the Sun – a prayer of praise to God for His creation. The prophetic poignancy of his condition draws us into the rich vision of a God soaked world that we are called to voice and contend for.

"May the power of your love, O Lord, fiery and sweet as honey, wean my heart from all that is under heaven, so that I may die for love of your love, you who were so good as to die for love of my love."

St. Francis

One of the Church's most beloved hymns, "All Creatures of our God and King," is attributed to Francis. Meditate on the following text, and ask the Lord to show you how he sees His creation. Does he have a word for you?

All Creatures of Our God and King

All creatures of our God and king
Lift up your voices and with us sing
Alleluia, alleluia
Thou burning with golden beam
Thou silver moon with softer gleam
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Thou rushing wind that art so strong
Ye clouds that sail in heav'n a long
Alleluia, alleluia
Thou rising morn in praise rejoice
Ye light of evening find a voice
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Thou flowing water pure and clear
Make music for thy Lord to hear
Alleluia, alleluia
Thou fire so masterful and bright
That gives to man both warmth and light
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Let all things their Creator bless,
and worship Him in humbleness;
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One;
O praise Him, O praise Him!
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

St. Helena's Compassion Action Team

"I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him."

Job 29:12

In the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 4, we find James and John mending nets. In their world, this was a regular, if not daily, process of scanning for worn and weak areas and restoring them to strength and vitality.

In Jeremiah 29, we are told to seek the welfare of the cities in which we find ourselves.

On nearly every street in North America, we can find places of disrepair. Places that are worn and weak. Places that need restoration and renewed vitality.

As Christ followers, we are called to be repairers of the breach, those who see areas of brokenness, and bring gospel restoration to those places.

In Beaufort, South Carolina, the historic St. Helena's Anglican church is actively at work, mending and restoring aging and broken places. Founded in 1711 and one of the oldest cities in South Carolina, Beaufort is adorned with moss-draped oak trees and antebellum architecture. Over its long history, this congregation has seen many cycles of renewal and decline. Today, they again bear witness to Jesus as they reach out to their neighbors, those whose homes and places of refuge have succumbed to the relentless aging of time.

DAY 26 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

*"Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."*

Isaiah 58:12

As St. Helena's walked in their neighborhood and engaged with their neighbors, they realized that many were in great need. Realizing they couldn't do everything, they knew they must do something.

In response, they created the Compassion Action Team to care for vulnerable individuals with nowhere else to turn. As they looked deeper, they were amazed to find the depth of restoration and help needed:

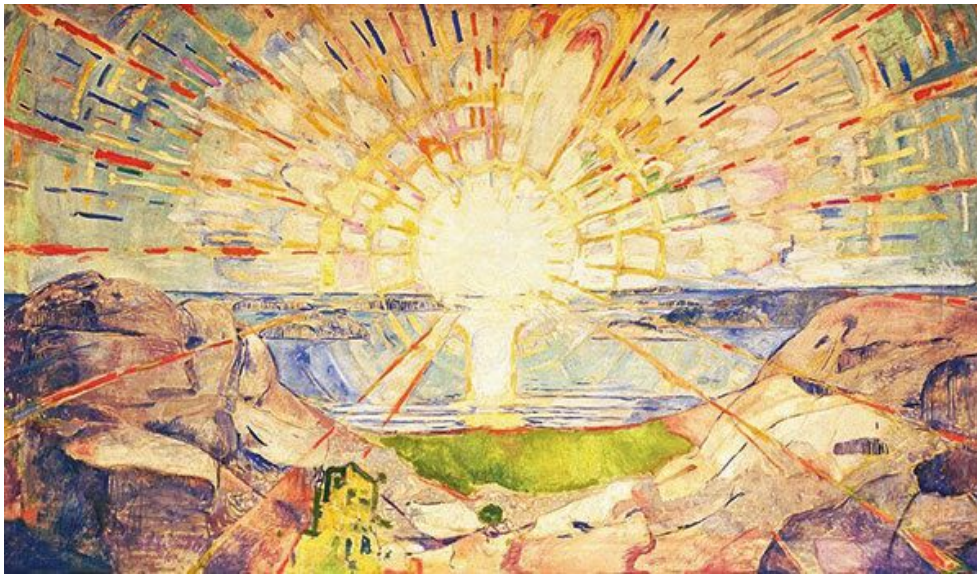
- They had neighbors needing emergency repairs to stop ceilings from leaking or falling in.
- Others needed repairs for unsafe porches and sinking floors.
- Others, often elderly and/or disabled, needed hot water heaters, beds, ramps and toilets.

In the process of building this team, St. Helena's also recognized that as "fishers of men," mending nets isn't simply bringing restoration to homes and living spaces. They acknowledged that it also involves relationship.

Because of this, the Compassion Action Team also extends grace and friendship to those they might otherwise not have been able to reach. Their work is also opening other doors in the city to other like-minded organizations. Their efforts not only help those who are in need but it also bridges gaps and builds trust for the long term.

For more information, see [Compassion Action Team](#) on our website!

DAY 26 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS



The Sun, by Edvard Munch

Allow your eyes to rest on this image above of the light and how the warmth and hope extends. Reflect for 2 minutes on the vision that God has for all to thrive, for all to flourish. Take a few seconds to pray for all those struggling with despair, disrepair, and experiencing what feels like insurmountable obstacles. Respond with gratitude in prayer that you and God's people get to be a part of this vision of hope and light.

What nets in your city need to be mended?

Where are the places in disrepair and needing restoration?

One practice many churches have is inviting small teams to walk the neighborhoods around their places of worship. The goal is to observe. Where are places of brokenness? Where are places worn and showing weakness? Engage your neighbors. Are there places of great safety concern, like those that St. Helena's found?

We may not be able to do everything, but likely we can, and should, do something. What is your sense of your own response?

A Biblical Basis for Creation Care

The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."

Isaiah 58:11

We continue our learning of creation care rooted in orthodox Christian faith. Our examples and teachers today are [A Rocha](#), which is "a global family of conservation organizations working together to live out God's calling to care for creation and equip others to do likewise." Founded by Anglicans, A Rocha's work is based in 20 countries with several more partner ministries. All this work is led by followers of Christ who are scientists, educators, and advocacy leaders.

A Rocha's work focuses on conservation and biodiversity development which comes alongside God's creation towards the health, restoration, and thriving of oceans, soil, fauna, and forests, to name a few.

A Rocha responds to the global crisis of biodiversity loss by carrying out community-based conservation projects, through:

- Ecological monitoring and research in areas of high value for wildlife
- Practical measures for conserving and restoring habitats and their fauna and flora
- Participation in nature conservation, through environmental education and community outreach
- Providing a forum for understanding the relevance of the Christian faith to environmental issues

For 40 years, A Rocha has been the leading voice for creation care from a Christian perspective.

DAY 27



Additionally, we'd like to highlight the work in ACNA of [Anglican Creation Care Network](#) who seek to help our Anglican family to be faithful stewards of creation. The leaders' work includes veterinary training, ecology, sustainable fisheries, and entomology.

Our attention today is on a deeply thoughtful statement which articulates a biblical basis for creation care, which you can also find on the [A Rocha website](#). We invite you to read carefully and prayerfully, catching this robust vision of a world filled with God's glory and our calling to participate with him.

If you would like to review some of the scriptural references on which this is based you can review [HERE](#).

The song, "[Brother Sun \(Giving Glory!\)](#)" is a worshipful testimony to our Creator God, from the perspective of his Creation. Listen and allow your heart to be drawn into worship of our Lord who made the heavens and earth.

A Biblical Commitment to Creation Care

As disciples of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, we bear witness to the divine authority of the Bible. This is summarized in the Nicene Creed and is the basis for the following affirmations of the historic Christian faith and is the foundation of our work.⁷ We come from many cultures and church traditions, yet are united in our desire to be faithful to Jesus, and to demonstrate Christ's Lordship in caring for God's world.⁸

God and Creation

We believe in one God, existing eternally in mutual loving relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In love, God created all that exists from the farthest reaches of the cosmos to the complex ecosystems of Earth. God delights in the natural world in all its wildness, beauty and mystery, declaring it 'very good'. Creation, in turn, is a source of wonder and wisdom, and a witness to God's divine nature and eternal power.

We rejoice in the beauty, diversity and complexity of the natural world, and commit ourselves to delighting in and treasuring God's good creation.

How We Know God

God is known supremely in Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Bible, through the Holy Spirit and also through creation. Our knowledge of God, therefore, comes through our relationship with Christ, commitment to the Word of God and our experience of creation, in worship, relationship, creativity and the scientific investigation of life and its intricate interconnections and dependencies.

We commit ourselves to worshipping and following Jesus as Lord, studying the Bible and seeking to glorify God as we study, learn from and care for God's created world.

Humanity and Creation

Human beings exist as creatures of the Earth, made in the image of God and given responsibility to reflect God's character in knowing, delighting in and caring for their fellow creatures and the whole Earth. Yet, human sin and rebellion against God mean alienation and brokenness in our relationships with God, people and the rest of creation. Sin leads to God's judgment, and it permeates and damages every area of life, including creation, which is subject to frustration and groans under the weight of human selfishness and sin.

We confess our involvement in selfish choices and sinful behaviours which damage God's creation. We commit ourselves, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to repent, to lament and to renew our vocation to serve and conserve God's creation, living in it and using it responsibly and sustainably.

God's Covenant with Creation

We believe God does not abandon creation, but in love continues to sustain and renew the Earth and all of creation. As recounted in the biblical narratives, God reaches out to a wounded world both in judgment and with the anticipation of renewal. God's covenant promise through Noah includes a future and a hope not only for people, but for all life on Earth and the Earth itself. In the accounts of land and people in the Old Testament, in times of both exile and settlement, and through prophetic visions of restored peaceful relationships, God's purposes consistently include not only people, especially the poor and marginalized, but also non-human creatures and the land itself.

We respond to God's initiative by committing ourselves to pursue justice and peace, mutual learning and collaboration in our relationships, and the thriving of the communities and ecosystems within which God has placed us.

Jesus' Life and Death

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, in whom God's good and glorious purposes for humankind and all creation come to fulfilment. In Jesus, God dwelt among us, taking on flesh and entering into creation, participating in the very life and matter of the world. In Christ, God entered into the suffering and brokenness of the world and revealed a new way of living within God's Kingdom of justice, peace and joy. In Christ's death on the cross, God defeated the power of sin and death and accomplished the reconciliation of all things – human and nonhuman – giving hope for all that is broken and spoiled, and eternal life to all who receive Him.

We care for creation motivated by our affirmation that Jesus is Lord. His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension give us purpose and hope for humanity and all creation.

Future Hope

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is the sign and guarantee of hope for humanity and for the whole creation. Christ will come again to renew all things, to destroy evil and death, and to bring the fullness of the Kingdom of God to Earth. The Bible speaks of both judgment and hope, discontinuity and continuity regarding God's new creation. We affirm, with the Apostle Paul, that creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay, to share in the freedom of God's children.

We seek to live in the power of Christ's risen life, through delighting in, learning from and participating in God's renewal and re-creation of the world.

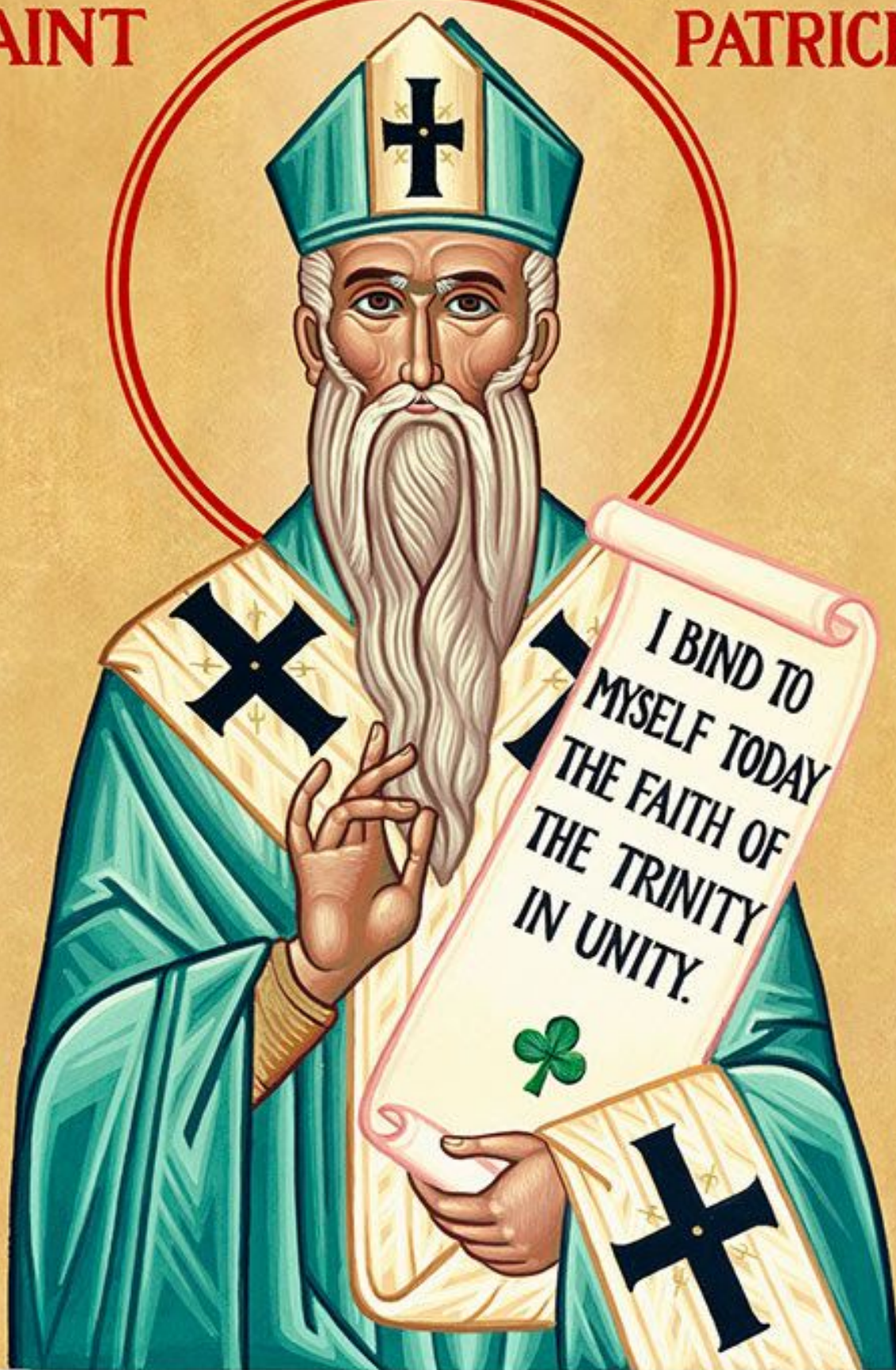
The Church's Mission in Caring for Creation

Creation care is integral to the gospel, the good news of Christ. As those who follow Jesus as Lord, we are called to live as citizens of Christ's Kingdom and members of Christ's body on Earth, the Church. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we participate in Christ's healing and reconciliation of relationships with one another and with all creation.

We respond to the call to follow Jesus joyfully and sacrificially in loving our neighbour, living simply and caring for creation. We call upon churches and all who follow Christ to join us in prayer, advocacy, and practical action on behalf of God's world. We delight in working with individuals, communities and organizations of many kinds as we fulfil this calling.

SAINT

PATRICK



The Prayer of St. Patrick

For our Saturday Prayers, we combine St Patrick's Breastplate with a prayer exercise.

This week, St Patrick's feast day is celebrated, honoring a former slave, oppressed and kidnapped. He was a trafficking victim who was used for forced labor for seven years.

The subsequent year, after escaping his enslavers, he suffered near starvation.

When he returned to Ireland as a priest, he engaged Irish culture with winsomeness and persistence. He held to the integrity of the gospel without bifurcating word and deed. He engaged all sectors of society, always caring for the poor and marginalized, while challenging and winning over those in power. Creation was constantly seen as the “book of God” from which to illustrate God’s love and who Christ is.

"Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?"

Augustine

DAY 28 | PRAYER

There are many ways to sing this poem, called "St. Patrick's Breastplate." For today, would you pray the words of this hymn over the vulnerable in Canada, Mexico, and the U.S.? Change the language at times from "us" to "them" as appropriate. We pray for:

- Families and communities suffering from chemical pollution in the water, in the air, in the soil.
- Individuals who didn't have a sufficient enough social and financial net to catch them after a natural disaster.
- The urban poor who have yet to experience the fierceness of the ocean and its soothing waves or the calm of a forest, and the healing peace of natural beauty and quiet.
- Those who live under airplane flight paths and next to railroads and highways, as noise pollution has been shown to compromise health and wellness, to stress the body, and to block the nervous system's ability to rest.

Pray for God to help us as parishes, small groups, and individuals to cultivate a flourishing natural world in our cities and towns. We can help knit the fabric of God's ecosystems and strengthen the interdependence between humans and flora and fauna in which he and we delight.

Note: St. Patrick's prayer is not meant to be read quietly in one's mind. It is meant to be prayed loudly and with intercessory force.

The Prayer of St. Patrick

We arise today

Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through a belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
Of the Creator of creation.

We arise today

Through the strength of Christ's birth and His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion and His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection and His
ascension,
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of
doom.

We arise today

Through the strength of the love of cherubim,
In obedience of angels,
In service of archangels,
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,
In the prayers of patriarchs,
In preachings of the apostles,
In faiths of confessors,
In innocence of virgins,
In deeds of righteous men.

We arise today

Through the strength of heaven;
Light of the sun,
Splendor of fire,
Speed of lightning,
Swiftness of the wind,
Depth of the sea,
Stability of the earth,
Firmness of the rock.

We arise today
Through God's strength to pilot us;
God's might to uphold us,
God's wisdom to guide us,
God's eye to look before us,
God's ear to hear us,
God's word to speak for us,
God's hand to guard us,
God's way to lie before us,
God's shield to protect us,
God's hosts to save us
From snares of the devil,
From temptations of vices,
From every one who desires us ill,
Afar and anear,
Alone or in a multitude.

We summon today all these powers between us and evil,
Against every cruel merciless power that opposes our
body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of women and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and
soul.

Christ shield us today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that reward may come to me in abundance.

Christ with us, Christ before us, Christ behind us,
Christ in us, Christ beneath us, Christ above us,
Christ on our right, Christ on our left,
Christ when we lie down, Christ when we sit down,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of us,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of us,
Christ in the eye that sees us,
Christ in the ear that hears us.

We arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through a belief in the Threeness,
Through a confession of the Oneness
Of the Creator of creation.

Place-Based Shalom

*"Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."*

Isaiah 58:12

We are approaching Holy Week. Today we have a brief three segment progression, building towards an extraordinary piece of art. Take the time to notice the three building blocks.

As we come to the end of the passage which has been our Lenten focus and theme, we see the words we just read above. Read them again and let them sink in:

"Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."

God is not giving those titles to himself, as you may have thought if you first skimmed the passage. Amazingly, he is giving those titles to his people! They are the ones who will be called Repairers and Restorers.

Could he give those titles to us, too? Let's look at the passage as a whole once more.

DAY 29

Isaiah 58:1-12 essentially describes what it looks like for a community to move from withering into flourishing. But it doesn't happen simply because of something the Lord does. It happens because the people of that community begin to act as God wants them to act. They begin to live as the hands and feet of Jesus. They:

- loose the chains of injustice
- untie the cords of the yoke
- set the oppressed free
- break every yoke
- share their food with the hungry
- provide the poor wanderer with shelter
- clothe the naked
- don't turn away from their own flesh and blood
- do away with the yoke of oppression
- do away with pointing fingers and malicious talk
- spend themselves on behalf of the hungry
- satisfy the needs of the oppressed

They do all the things we've been talking about these past five weeks of Lent. And in that ecosystem of mutual flourishing, living God's blueprint for the world, then the rains of even more shalom happen and we are all brought in to further thriving?

- The Lord guides them
- He satisfies their needs
- He strengthen their frame
- They become like a well-watered garden
- They rebuild the ancient ruins
- They raise up the age-old foundations
- They are called Repairer of Broken Walls
- They are called Restorer of Streets with Dwellings
-

What a beautiful picture of flourishing, wholeness, and health – shalom. We are called to be Repairers and Restorers. This is holy, God-imaging work.

DAY 29

"Biblical flourishing is missional, priestly, and outward focused, motivated on spreading God's glory throughout the earth. We flourish when we help others flourish."

Hugh Whelchel

We've talked about the importance of place – of home. We were meant for stability, for putting down roots and building a life together. But home can also be more than merely the structure in which we live; it's our street, our neighborhood, our city. What does it look like to pursue flourishing for others on that kind of scale?

The Lupton Center⁹, one of the leading Christian community development and neighborhood flourishing experts describe a simple progression based on a question:

Why are some struggling more than others?

- Youth need mentors
- Families need work
- Workers need housing
- Housing is one of the many structures in a place
- Neighborhood is the unit of change

Why is income mobility spread out differently in different places? In a robust and far reaching research project neighborhoods all across North America were assessed. The focus was when it comes to breaking cycles of poverty how powerful is the neighborhood you grew up in as opposed to education, family culture, individual choices to name a few.

DAY 29

The answers that those questions revealed several observations:

- Place does affect us, most profoundly as children.
- Every year of exposure to a better childhood environment improves their long-term income mobility.
- Where you grow up matters.
- The conclusion is that we must develop neighborhoods in place

Isn't it heartening when research and analysis points us right back to God, his ways, and scripture. The call has always been to love our neighbors and our place and to speak and be the gospel in tangible ways.

Fragile or marginal neighborhood communities need people who will be the Repairers of Broken Walls and the Restorers of Streets with Dwellings. How can we pursue flourishing on their behalf?

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

Jeremiah 29:4-7

DAY 29

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you...for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Or, as Hugh Whelchel said in the quote above, "We flourish when we help others flourish."

We live as exiles, in some ways, because we know that we ultimately belong to a kingdom that is not of this world. But wherever we are, the Lord has placed us there, and he asks us to seek its welfare.

He stands ready to guide us, satisfy our needs, and strengthen our frames. The invitation is "Step out."

This week we will be learning more about what it means to become the Repairers and Restorers God has called us to be. Spend 2 minutes allowing your eyes and imagination to roam the following piece of art by Jen Norton. First, delight in the shalom and flourishing that stirs the heart and enlivens the mind. See how each part of flourishing is relational. Take 20 seconds to pray for fragile neighborhoods in your city or town and ask God to help his people bring wholeness like this.



Place-Based Shalom

"God, people, and place are inseparably intertwined in the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps more than by any other means, biblical authors used notions of place to express and explore their relationship to God and neighbor."

Cory Crawford

Many churches around the world and throughout history have impacted their neighborhoods and the mile radius around their place of worship, because of intentionality, authentic listening, and response. Most of these stories never make it into a book or a news article. But these stories are written on the hearts and lives of the individuals, families, and generations who experienced the gospel made tangible in holistic missional engagement.

The biblical challenge to love our neighbors can be as simple as that, loving our neighbors. Dr. Seth Kaplan is a leading expert on fragile states, political transitions, conflict prevention, state-building, governance, and human rights. When asked to consider our own North American context, he responded with his recommendation of what is needed to bring place-based shalom to a community:

"We may better achieve change on a national level by not focusing on it at all. Indeed, renewal is only possible by shifting our energy to what Americans already do quite well — caring about and investing in the people and places closest to home. Scale is essential to enhancing social habitats, but it must be human scale."

"You will be called... Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."

Isaiah 58:12

DAY 30 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

Yes, it is important to consider issues that focus on one vulnerable demographic such as those experiencing homelessness, those subject to being exploited and even trafficked, and refugees, among others. However, we cannot forget that scripture reminds us that incarnational work within the fabric of a place-based local community is always the call of the church. As Anglicans, we hold this sacramental worldview that place matters, and therefore fragile neighborhoods are a place of invitation.

Studies of Canadian urban neighborhoods have shown that individuals in lower-income families, single parents, recent immigrants, and visible minorities value having access to grocery stores, public transportation, and green spaces.¹⁰ It is notable how essential those three factors are to one's quality of life. How might churches partnering with nonprofits and municipal leaders work towards increasing such access?

In Mexico there is often not the ability to rely on large funders or government help. Parishes have the ability to focus on hyperlocal connections in their neighborhoods to help develop community-driven solutions to their needs which leads to greater sustainability in the long run.

“Community transformation is about the quality of neighbors, not the quality of programs.”

“It is beginning to dawn on the world of compassion that the root causes of poverty can be addressed effectively only through development, not through one-way giving.”

Robert Lupton

Urban ministry leader and author of *Theirs is the Kingdom* and *Toxic Charity*

DAY 30 | LEAN IN AND LEARN

Those involved in Christian Community Development, which by definition is neighborhood based, value an ABCD approach: "Asset Based Community Development." ABCD is built on four foundations:¹¹

- The focus is on the neighborhood's assets and strengths rather than problems and needs.
- Individual and community assets, skills and passions are identified and mobilized.
- The response is community driven – 'building communities from the inside out'
- The entire process is relationship driven.

Through this approach there is such respect and honor of the image of God reflected in those in the community. There is an awareness and humility that assumes that God has been previously active in the neighborhood, and churches can come alongside to do the Holy Spirit detective work towards effective transformation that is mutual and collaborative. A posture of learning is critical. Creative partnerships with multiple --and, at times, unexpected-- stakeholders generates substantial change. Often this change is slower, but more likely lasting.

Many Anglicans are doing this work. Many of you are doing this work. Thank you. May many more step into this work.

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Galatians 6:2

Gladys Aylward

"Here was I worrying about my journey, while God was helping me all the way. It made me realize that I am very weak; my courage is only borrowed from Him, but, oh, the peace that floods my soul; and although I know that I may be held up at the border, I am at peace within, because I know that He never faileth."

Gladys Aylward

Gladys Aylward was a woman short of stature, but not of spunk. She is remembered for her work in Yangcheng, China, where she lovingly served the abandoned, orphaned, injured, refugee, and displaced people of her community.

She was born in 1902 in Edmonton, England, to a working-class family. Gladys didn't get far in her formal education, having left school to work as a maid. In her mid-twenties, she attended a captivating revival meeting and became a Christian that night. Not long after, she heard of the need for missionaries to China and felt called to respond. As Gladys worked to save enough money to travel to China, an innkeeper named Jeannie Lawson, who lived in the Yangcheng province of northern China, contacted her church to ask for someone to come and help her at the inn.

"Oh God, here's my Bible, Here's my money. Here's me. Use me, God."

Gladys Aylward

DAY 31 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST



The journey to Yangcheng was dangerous, but Gladys finally made it to Jeannie with help from some kind strangers. At the inn, Jeannie was able to provide hospitality while also sharing about her faith. Gladys and Jeannie worked together for a little while, but Jeannie soon fell ill and died. **Now in charge of the inn, Gladys invested in the community by providing a space to rest, communal settlement, and a place for people to be cared for.**

She learned the local dialect, spoke constantly of the love of Jesus, and gained the respect of the "mandarin" (public official). At one point, the mandarin also asked her to stop a prison riot. At only 4 feet 10 inches, Gladys helped the prisoners mediate their disagreements, and she even asked the mandarin to improve their conditions. Christians have always been involved in prison reform: "I was in prison and you came to visit me," says Jesus in Matthew 25:36.

DAY 31 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST

Gladys was also the first foreign missionary to China to become a Chinese citizen, solidifying her love and dedication to the people. She chose to follow as Christ did in incarnational living out the gospel. Their story became her story. Their pain and joy became her pain and joy. This is God's invitation to his church, and to not be distant but come near and walk alongside those who are vulnerable or lost on the journey of life.

"Life is pitiful, death so familiar, suffering and pain so common, yet I would not be anywhere else. Do not wish me out of this or in any way seek to get me out, for I will not be got out while this trial is on. These are my people, God has given them to me, and I will live or die with them, for Him and His glory."

Gladys Aylward

Gladys was a refugee of war herself, having been in China when the country went to war with Japan in 1937. She collected information about Japanese troop movements to send to government forces.

As the fighting moved closer to Yangcheng, Gladys cared for the wounded and homeless refugees in caves nearby – as well as the 94 abandoned children she had taken in.

Having witnessed the Japanese soldiers' indiscriminate violence towards women and children, Gladys decided to flee with the children. Gladys led the 94 children on a 12-day journey through the mountains, because the Japanese troops had blocked the roads around Yangcheng. Through many challenges, they made it to safety and the kids were placed in safe homes.

DAY 31 | A CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVIST

Gladys continued to care for refugees and provide hospitality to children for the rest of her life. She founded a refugee aid organization in Hong Kong, as well as an orphanage in Taiwan. Gladys died in 1970 at the age of 67.

We might be tempted to think of Gladys as a "special person" because she was in the category of a "foreign missionary." But, in fact, she just chose each next step to care for those in need around her. She made the effort to see. Then to draw near. And then to act and be inconvenienced and to take risks over and over. But it was just each next step of responding to being the presence of Christ. This is the same invitation we are offered to respond to fragile neighborhoods in our cities and communities. Who else will go but us, his people? Here are we, send us, Lord.

This song, "[Here I Am, Lord](#)" is a beautiful imagining of a conversation between God and each of us. Listen and meditate on the lyrics. The last verse is especially poignant, and captures the tension between God's work and our actions:

*I, the Lord of wind and flame
I will tend the poor and lame
I will set a feast for them
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide
'Til their hearts be satisfied
I will give my life to them
Whom shall I send?*

He will do it – but whom will he send?

Anglican Legal Aid & Reconciliation

*"The Lord loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love."*

Psalm 33:5

What do you do when access to justice and legal resources are beyond your financial means?

How do you engage a legal system that typically requires thousands of dollars to retain legal counsel?

How do we ensure that everyone has the opportunity to find counsel, protection, advocacy, and defense in our legal systems?

Many of us are familiar with the admonition of Proverbs 31:8-9. We are told to "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

How do we do that in ways that care for the vulnerable while seeking truth and reconciliation? One of the Matthew 25 Initiative 2023 grant recipients found a way. It is an honor, as M25i, to be able to both support this work and tell their story.

The Anglican Legal Aid & Reconciliation (ALAR) clinic reaches multiple-vulnerable populations by not only providing low-cost legal care but also offering fellowship and community through local parishes.

DAY 32 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

“If death got the upper hand through one man’s wrongdoing, can you imagine the breathtaking recovery life makes, sovereign life, in those who grasp with both hands this wildly extravagant life-gift, this grand setting-everything-right, that the one man Jesus Christ provides?”

Romans 5:17

The work of ALAR involves:

- Custody Support
- Juvenile Defense
- Post-conviction Writs
- Family Law
- Mediation
- Criminal Defense
- Wills and Estates
- Landlord-tenant Disputes
- Certain Civil Litigation

This team of visionary Anglicans who serve the entire area, engages each person with vigorous hope, helping youth who could so easily spiral but could be redirected with mentoring and tutoring and support. Women who are vulnerable to abuse are protected. A single parent might not have to suffer the burdens that would come without child support. For those who have committed a crime, ALAR advocates for their dignity and a fair process that makes way for restoration. Additionally those who have been wrongfully convicted have a chance for injustice to be righted.

DAY 32 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

*"He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?"*

Micah 6:8

ALAR provides theologically-informed legal services to those who are under-resourced. Legal services will not be free, but are offered at greatly reduced fees.

Imagine desperately needing competent, caring, legal counsel but realizing that it was well beyond your financial means. Imagine feeling alone, hopeless, and helpless.

Now imagine hearing that an organization connected to a welcoming community was willing to help. Willing to hear your case, to care for you, to pray for you, to support you.

For those in the Rio Grande Valley, they don't have to imagine — they simply need to call ALAR.



The Unforgiving Servant, by Jim Janknegt

Place-Making and Contending for Shalom

“Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by.

And they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’”

Ezekiel 36:33-35

Today, we continue diving into the ideas around place-based shalom and the heart of God for his people.

“We are created in the image of a place-making God who not only made the whole earth, but also carved out special places in it, like the Garden. When we understand that, we are living more fully and more wholly into who we were created to be originally – after all, our story begins in a garden!”

Christie Purifoy

Our story does indeed begin in a garden, and it will continue eternally in the new creation. If it is possible for Eden and the new creation to somehow meet in the here-and-now, it just might be in and through the kind of “place-based, contending-for-shalom” work that we are called to as God’s image bearers today.

DAY 33

One such group doing that work is New Garden Farm, a ministry of Church of the Redeemer in Greensboro, North Carolina. Their mission is “to cultivate a ‘front porch’ farm where the parish, community, and the land are all nourished by the Gospel.” The description of their work includes space, land, God, generativity, and claiming what might be dismissed as “dead space”.

“God has been deeply faithful over the past several years, as we have transformed nearly an acre from gravel-covered wasteland into productive, intensively and sustainably farmed land.”

You may be wondering how a church-farm contends for shalom, or how it can nourish the community with the Gospel. New Garden Farm has four different areas of focus that together help these goals to be realized:

1. **They give away some of their food to the hungry,** thereby engaging in the “true fasting,” that God has chosen, ie Isaiah 58:7.
2. **They sell some of their food to people in the community,** thereby building relationships with those outside the church and providing them with healthy, locally grown foods.
3. **They grow East African foods specifically because their city and church have a large East African refugee population,** thereby welcoming the stranger and the “poor wanderer” of Isaiah 58:7.
4. **They offer a training program that combines farming skills, discipleship, and income opportunities** for East African refugees, thereby helping them to contend for shalom right where God has planted them

DAY 33

"Everyone has the right to live in a great place. More importantly, everyone has the right to contribute to making the place where they already live great."

Fred Kent, who is the founder of Project for Public Spaces, an organization dedicated to creating public places that foster communities

New Garden Farm is an example of a rich, holistic approach to community and place-based shalom that can serve as inspiration for us all. Take hope – then ask yourself, is there a way for you to take action, too?

What are "dead spaces" in our city or in our community from which life, beauty, rest, and hope could sprout up? It requires time, sacrifice, diligence, discomfort, humility, and faith vision. We are invited into creativity with the Spirit such that those far from God might say "I am so glad those followers of Christ are here. It makes me wonder."



Slow. Place. People.

"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: '...seek the peace and prosperity (shalom) of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers (shalom), you too will prosper (shalom)'"

Jeremiah 29:4,7

Every Saturday of Lent is dedicated to prayer. Reminding ourselves that God is God. And we are not. And also he has charged us with being his hands and feet, his eyes and ears, his hugs and stillness, his advocates and warriors. We hold the tension of the fact that he is on mission and holds all power and might, and that we are called to mission alongside him in faithfulness.

We share communities with those similar to us and those different than us. We are commanded to seek ethical communities for all. The message of scripture, and explicitly and directly the message of the prophets such as Jeremiah, is that we are to seek the flourishing of all. We are held responsible for all, especially the vulnerable. Nobody is to be excluded or forgotten. So what does it mean to look beyond our own needs and comfort to seek the meeting of needs and comfort of those who struggle more than we?

And with that question we take these things to prayer, to the God is bigger and stronger and more loving than we can imagine. [Focused Community Strategies](#) offers us seven prayers (consider printing these out and putting them up where you can be reminded).

DAY 34 | PRAYER

1. Pray for families. Families are a crucial social unit, and they can weather some significant challenges. Pray for the parents, aunts, grandparents, uncles, cousins, siblings, and children in your neighborhood.

Heavenly Father, we ask for your presence in families in our neighborhood. We pray for strength and understanding between the marriages in our neighborhood. We ask for loving, strong bonds between the children, teenagers, adults, and grandparents. We pray that each branch of the family would demonstrate love for one another.

2. Pray for relationships between neighbors. Healthy relationships between neighbors create a loving and compassionate community, Pray that neighbors would learn from each other's differences and find common ground in their community.

God Almighty, we ask for healthy, thriving relationships between neighbors. We pray different cultures will be able to understand and care for one another in our neighborhood. We pray that the diversity of your people will be celebrated by all neighbors, just as you affirm and love each one of us.

DAY 34 | PRAYER

3. Pray for schools. Pray that schools would be a place of positive influence for students in the neighborhood. We hope to see schools that contribute to the social fabric of a community and equip our children to achieve and thrive.

Father, we pray for the teachers and local principals who devote their days to shepherding our students. Please be present as district and state leaders make impactful decisions. We ask for guidance and patience for the parent volunteers as they serve our neighborhood schools. We pray that our schools will be a safe, positive community for our students.

4. Pray for local churches. Neighborhood churches are too often disconnected from the communities in which the physical building resides. We hope to see congregations committed to serving the residents and representing the hands and feet of Jesus.

Lord God, we pray for guidance for our local pastors as they nurture Your congregation and seek to serve those around them. We pray congregations would welcome neighbors with open arms. We hope for residents to find a place to experience community with the body of Christ as they grow spiritually.

DAY 34 | PRAYER

5. Pray for safety and peace. A neighborhood where all residents feel welcomed and safe is one we strive to create. Pray God would allow your neighbors to find safety in their living situation.

God, our Prince of Peace, we ask for your presence in the streets and homes of our community. We pray for local law enforcement, for their safety and wisdom and compassion in all circumstances. We pray your comfort for those who have experienced violence, and we ask your protection for all our neighbors.

6. Pray for local politicians and leaders. Many neighborhoods experience marginalization when important decisions are being made. Pray for community voices to be heard in matters that impact them at the local, city, and state levels.

Father, we ask you to give our state and local leaders wisdom make decisions affecting our neighborhood. We pray they will be thoughtful in their decisions and listen to the voices of the community. We pray for courage to stand up for our community and to live with grace and dignity in our city.

7. Pray for residents. Pray for each neighbor by their name. Pray that your neighbors and residents of the neighborhood will know Jesus more deeply in their lives and have the opportunity to flourish as a community.

God, we ask for a flourishing community, where neighbors learn to love each other and come to know Jesus. We pray that we can be good stewards of Your love to each one of our neighbors. We ask that You help us to learn from our community, and it may be a place where all are welcomed.

Holy Monday

“You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?”

Isaiah 58:4,5

Yesterday, with the celebration of Palm Sunday, we entered into Holy Week – Semana Santa. This is the one week of the year when the church calendar slows to meet us in our humanity, and we walk with Jesus in real time through his final days on earth before his crucifixion.

We can see the end of Lent in sight, but before we can celebrate His resurrection, we must witness and walk with him through his betrayal, his passion, and his death. That is what our Lenten practices have been building toward – their telos – and it is also the foundation from which they spring – their raison d’être.

This Lenten season, we have spent our time digging deep into Isaiah 58, and harnessing it as a lens through which we can understand our Lenten calling to “true fasting.” Fasting has always been one of the historical Lenten practices of the church, along with prayer and almsgiving.

But in Isaiah 58, God makes a distinction between the perfunctory kind of fasting that we might engage in simply because it’s “what we do,” and the kind of fasting that he himself has chosen. He is clear: he doesn’t want our “bowed heads;” he doesn’t want our “lying down in sackcloth and ashes,” even if those motions come from a humble heart. **He wants us to show love in action, on behalf of the oppressed and the poor.**

DAY 35

"See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit."

Zechariah 9:9-11

On the day after his "triumphal entry," Jesus cleansed the Temple from the merchants and money changers. They were there to sell animals, such as doves, so that even the poorest of God's people could fulfill his command to make sacrifices in the Temple.

The fact that they were selling animals and changing money wasn't the problem – the problem was that they were using "unequal weights," or "dishonest scales," in order to make more profit, at the expense of the poor. Rather than "set[ting] the oppressed free and break[ing] every yoke," they are tightening the yoke, and increasing the burden of oppression. Essentially, they are engaging in the very kinds of practices that God condemns in Isaiah 58.

"The Lord detests double standards; he is not pleased by dishonest scales."

Proverbs 20:3

DAY 35

Jesus cleansed the Temple of injustice, dishonesty, and avarice. He was outraged that true worship had turned into an opportunity to oppress the poor through greedy and unjust tactics. It was blasphemous and In Isaiah 58, God's people are called to do the same.

And now we, as the church, are also called the temple of God – both communally and individually. “True fasting” necessitates that we show love in action, on behalf of the oppressed and the poor.

What would it look like for us to cleanse our own communities, our own hearts, of injustice, dishonesty, and greed?

*"Come to your Temple here with liberation
And overturn these tables of exchange
Restore in me my lost imagination
Begin in me for good, the pure change."*

Malcolm Guite

3Sixty Community Development

The godly will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

Psalm 92:12-15

Before we enter the Easter Triduum, we want to focus today and tomorrow on Anglicans on the Streets outreaches doing incredible work contending for place-based shalom.

To shape our Tuesday with holy imagination, let's learn from 3Sixty, a community development organization serving Holland, Michigan, that is working to "connect neighbors, share resources, and build community." 3Sixty is led by Jake+ Norris, who holds the title of "missioner" at All Saints Holland. All Saints partners with 3Sixty because, in their own words, All Saints "is committed to the flourishing of our broader community, and we believe our spiritual formation overflows into goodness and love for neighbor."

Both All Saints Anglican and 3Sixty are taking seriously God's second-most important commandment: to love those "next door" as themselves. They see the various ways those in their geographic community are failing to flourish, and they see that they can make a difference.

Take a moment to consider the name they've chosen: "3Sixty." What does that connote? Seeing. Comprehensive. Thorough. Nothing and nobody left out. Arms wrapped around a part of the city.

DAY 36 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

3Sixty sees their focus as:

"Building living communities where neighbors feel equally known and committed to the well-being of their neighborhood. Every resident—regardless of age, financial situation, or position in life—has gifts they can offer their community. As a neighbor-led nonprofit, we strive to be a catalyst and connector for people helping people. We work hard to empower, organize, and resource neighbors to address problems and meet their needs together."

3Sixty has created many different community development initiatives, including:

- Spring and Fall Neighborhood Clean-Ups
- A tool library for neighbors to share and borrow tools
- Beautification projects such as mural-painting festivals
- Neighborhood connection groups
- Participation in a City Shapers cohort led by the Lupton Center

Ultimately, the vision of 3Sixty is that those living and working within a multiple block area would carry the full leadership of supporting the assets and meeting the needs relevant to their context. Imagine under-resourced families and individuals never needing a food pantry, because they are all connected as neighbors, and creative ways are sought to address food insecurity through friendships and partnerships with community stakeholders.

28% of Americans do not know any of their neighbors by name.

Pew Research Center

DAY 36 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

"If you want to make lasting, positive change in a community, neighbors need to be in the driver's seat—dreaming and working together."

3Sixty

How can parish leaders partner with neighborhood leaders?

The combined leadership team pursued a three year process of listening, learning, and capturing stories. The discernment that resulting in "City Shapers" included a deep dive assessing the health of their community across economic, social, and structural indicators.

This entrepreneurial effort has the long game in mind: a community that can truly grow and flourish on its own – not propped up as a fragile tree, with stakes and ropes to support it and keep it upright, but standing tall on its own and able to support a diversity of life under its shade.

Read about this thoughtful process [here](#).

Faithfulness to God, obedience to His ways, and love for neighbor means that God is at work in Holland, Michigan, changing the culture one neighborhood at a time. Anglicans at All Saints Holland are contending for place-based shalom.



Mural in Holland, Michigan, by @htownink

Heritage Mission

"Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD."

Leviticus 19:32

A generation is dying alone.

Throughout history and across cultures and geography, the majority of families have lived together, intergenerationally. These families typically have been made up of grandparents, parents, children, and sometimes extended relatives all living together under one roof or in close proximity. Old age and death were experienced within the family.

Today, in our North American context, many die alone, without their biological family or their church family.

- It is estimated that 21% of deaths in the US occur in nursing homes and long-term care facilities.
- 60% of nursing home residents don't ever receive a single visitor.

*"It's been 23 years since sociologist Robert Putnam chronicled America's declining relational networks in his book **Bowling Alone**.*

As the first "bowling alone" generation now enters nursing homes and assisted-care facilities, they do so with fewer loved ones to support them and fewer churches to close the gap. They're dying alone, and few Christians are doing anything about it."

Rev. Dr. Michael Niebauer

DAY 37 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

The opportunities for missional vision and scope are incredible. Anglican parishes can step into sacred and faithful work among the physically vulnerable.

Nursing homes and assisted care facilities remain a significant and largely unreached mission field in the North America. Pay attention to each of these facts below, as each matters and is about lives, not mere numbers:

- More than 2 million Americans live in these facilities today
- According to demographers, residents aged 65 and older are part of the fastest-growing age group in Canada today
- Around 7 out of 10 Americans will spend a portion of their lives in care
- Many care homes lack the financial resources to provide any Christian activities
- In Canada, where medically assisted euthanasia (MAID) is legal, it is notable that, according to the last significant statistics, the Atlantic provinces and Quebec are home to the largest proportion of seniors, accounting for 20% to 22% of residents in each province.

Isaiah 58:7 challenges us to “not turn away from our own flesh and blood,” which most biblical scholars understand to mean “do not turn your eyes from” those of common humanity who are in distress or need care.

A true fast is one that remembers that we are but dust; we all age; and all those who are in their sunset years need missional outreach and care. The people of God are called to offer the gospel in tangible ways where vulnerability is deeply experienced.

DAY 37 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS



La Joie de Vivre, by Ernst Josephson

With "kingdom of God" entrepreneurship and creativity, Michael+ Neubauer takes seriously this Isaiah 58:7 admonition. He has founded an organization that partners with parishes called Heritage Mission that focuses on raising awareness of the poor conditions of nursing homes and the dearth of Christians actively involved in the lives of nursing home residents.

Strategically, Heritage Mission seeks to generate worshipping communities in care facilities, because "the Gospel will be shared with dozens of individuals currently outside of the church. Few, if any, other outreach programs have this kind of immediate impact on those who are not actively Christian."

DAY 37 | ANGLICANS ON THE STREETS

Parishes can start 30-minute services without it being a heavy load, as Heritage Mission offers:

- Instructional videos and tutorials on running weekly worship services, including how to lead and engage with residents.
- Training modules on navigating the medical system
- Marketing materials for inviting residents to service.
- Templates for printing weekly bulletins (used by residents).
- Hymn database, chord sheets, and audio recordings for singing along.
- Free Bibles for services.

Michael and his team envisions a day when the church is present and actively engaged in the lives of our forebears, companions and friends in the twilight years of their lives.

As a 2023 recipient of the Matthew 25 Initiative Grant, the Heritage Mission provides free, professional training, resources, and coaching for individuals, groups, and churches willing to create Christian communities within nursing homes and assisted living care facilities. This exciting and sustainable model provides "opportunities to share the Gospel to those who have left the church, and a church to those who never wanted to leave the church."

What would it look like if every aging person in care had a family to share with, pray with, and be loved by? Jesus, along with the prophet Isaiah, calls us to be that "family."

Maundy Thursday

*"If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday."*

Isaiah 58:9-10

Today, we observe Maundy Thursday, the day that Christ celebrated Passover with his disciples and washed their feet, before he was betrayed by Judas.

If you are newer to Anglicanism, you might be wondering about the meaning of "Maundy." It comes from the Latin word for mandate, meaning "command," and refers to Jesus' words after he had finished washing his disciples' feet:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

John 13:34

Foot washing was a standard practice when entering a home at this time and place in history. People wore sandals, the streets were dusty and dirty, and so feet became quite filthy very quickly. Therefore, shoes were removed and feet were washed upon crossing the threshold. It was a very practical custom of sanitation.



Washing of Feet, from Giotto's fresco series "Scenes From the Life of Christ", in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padova, Italy, 1304 AD

In the average home, people washed their own feet, but in a wealthy home, a servant or slave would wash the feet of guests. The job was considered disgusting, and was only given to the lowliest of servants.

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

John 13:14

DAY 38

Yet here we see our Lord and Savior, King Jesus, stooping in humility to wash the dirty feet of his disciples. This is love – demonstrated in action, in practical caretaking, in literally "getting his hands dirty."

Setting aside his own comfort and pride, he assumes the role of the lowliest servant on behalf of his friends, in order that they – that we – might have a living illustration of how to treat each other. How to serve each other. How to love each other.

"In humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."

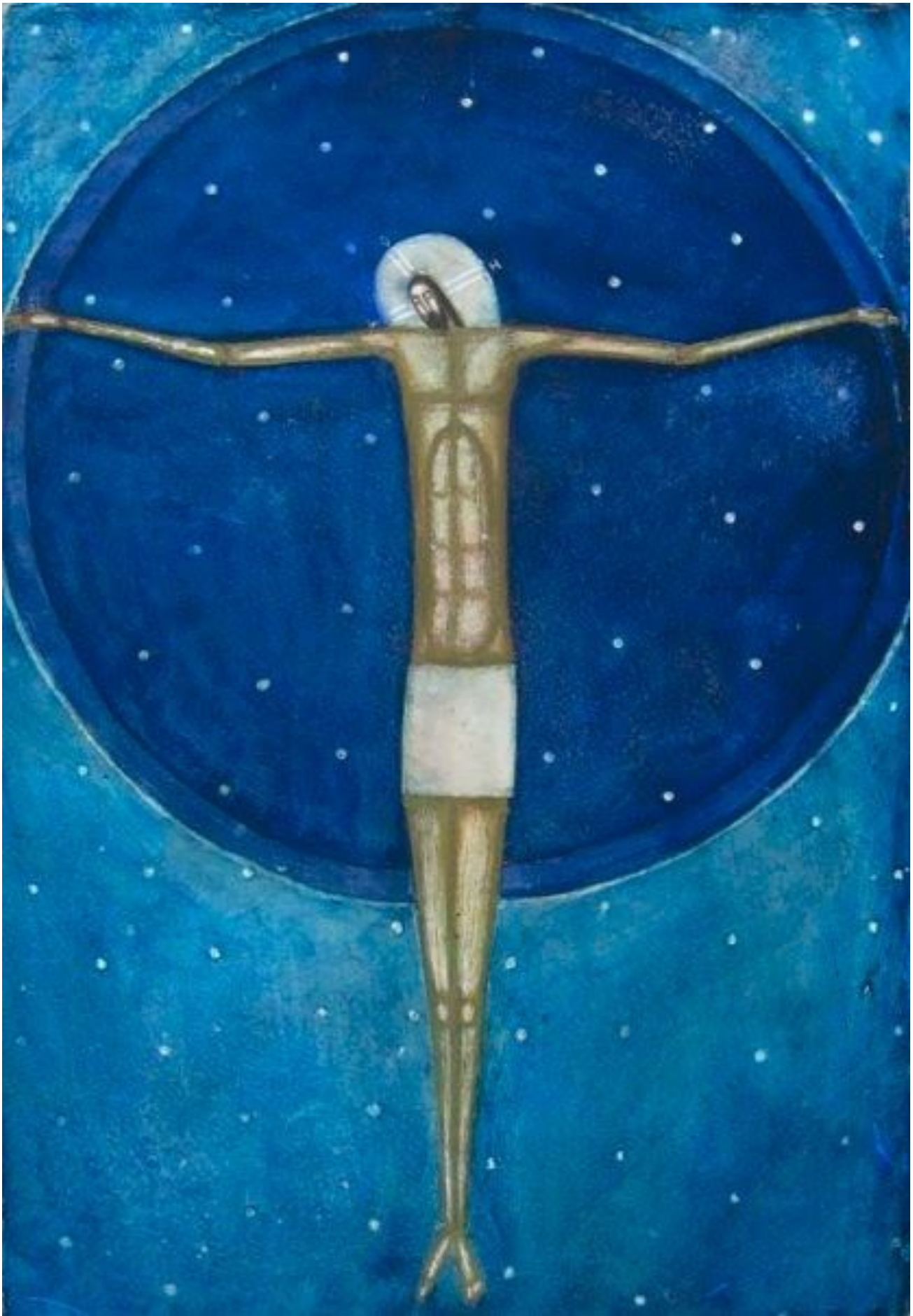
Philippians 2:3-4

In God's upside-down Kingdom, where the first shall be last and the last shall be first, our King humbles himself to be a servant to all, and tells us to love each other in the same way that he has loved us. What does this mean for us today, in North America in 2024? How can we "wash each other's feet?" The answer brings us back to Isaiah 58. We can love others the way Christ loves us when we:

- loose the chains of injustice
- break every yoke
- set the oppressed free
- share our food with the hungry
- provide the poor wanderer with shelter
- clothe the naked
- satisfy the needs of the oppressed

Over the past six weeks, we've learned about and prayed about human trafficking, food insecurity, homelessness, creation care, and community development.

How is God calling you to "wash the feet" of those who are hungry, without shelter, or living under the weight of being neglected or those who require effort to be seen?



Crucifixion, by Natalya Rusetska (Ukrainian, 1984–), 2013.

Good Friday

"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Isaiah 53:4-5

Today's reflection speaks to those of us in this work and how we make sense of it as followers of Jesus. The gaps, the fuel, the model. What is a theology that sustains and gives meaning for us in M25i kind of work?

Last night, we officially entered into the Triduum, and today we observe Good Friday. Many of us will engage in some sort of additional fasting today, or attend a Good Friday service. What does it mean for us to fast in light of Good Friday, and Isaiah 58?

Just a few chapters earlier, we read above the prophetic words of Isaiah that describe the coming Messiah: he took up our pain, he bore our suffering, he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.

But we can't stop there – we must keep reading: for it is his woundability that brought us peace; **by his wounds we are healed**. He was fatally wounded.

All of our true fasting, entering into solidarity with those who suffer, removing obstacles that block thriving, showing up for "the one" -- they really do matter -- because we are Jesus' hands and feet today, because he has commanded us to love through action, because that is the kind of true fasting God has chosen, according to Isaiah 58.

DAY 39

And we must always remember that ultimately, Jesus is the true healer. He is the one who brings **true peace, true flourishing, true shalom.**

"Who can save a child from a burning house without taking the risk of being hurt by the flames? Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in his own heart and even losing his precious peace of mind? In short: 'Who can take away suffering without entering it?'"

Henri Nouwen

Henri Nouwen's words above are from his book, *The Wounded Healer*, and of course, Jesus himself is the epitome of the wounded healer. He was wounded for our sins, and by his wounds we are healed – not just each of us individually, but on a much larger scale. God intends to bring wholeness, health, healing, flourishing, shalom to us, our neighborhoods, our cities, all of creation, and the entire cosmos, through the wounds of Christ.

Our work and presence among the vulnerable, the forgotten, those whose hope is crushed because they can't find a way out of the pain -- must therefore always be rooted first and foremost in the work of Christ on the cross. We do not strive out of our own energies or from any sense of false guilt, nor in a foolish attempt to earn God's favor or love. His love is already poured out upon each of us in all its fullness! He has promised to make all things new, and he asks us to trust that all shalom will be restored. There will be a day with no more tears. And his blood shed in his brutal execution is God's downpayment on that promise. He is showing us that he chooses to go all the way with his love.

DAY 39

Instead, we participate in true fasting out of the overflow of Christ's work in our hearts. We love because He first loved us. And just as he is a wounded healer, so we, too, are called to be wounded healers, pouring out our love for others as we contend for shalom.

"Nobody escapes being wounded. We are all wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not, 'How can we hide our wounds?' so we don't have to be embarrassed, but 'How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?' When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers."

Henri Nouwen

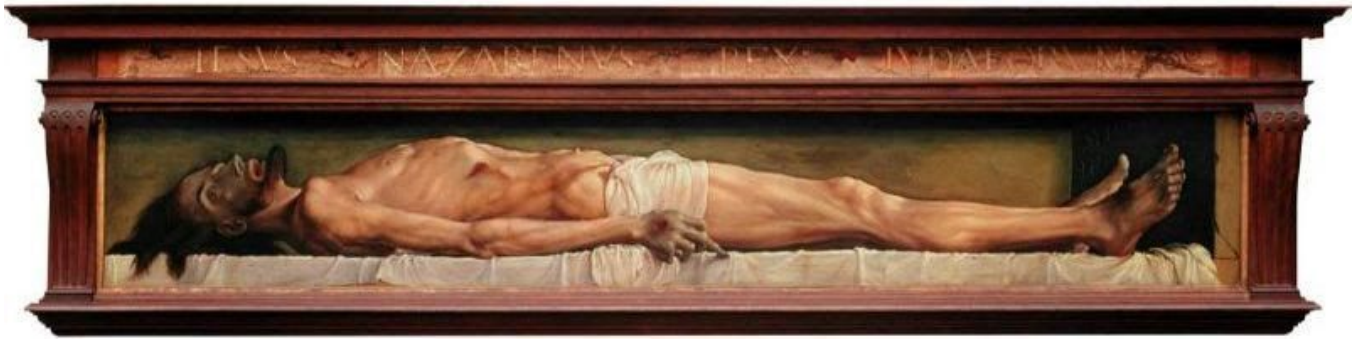
Take five minutes, and hear the words of the song sinking deep into your heart:

*"Purest Jesus, you held us to the end.
Truest Jesus, you taught us to the end.
Strongest Jesus, you bore us to the end.
Dearest Jesus, you loved us to the end."*

He is the one who holds us, teaches us, bears us up, and loves us, and it is by his wounds that we are healed so that we, too, can become wounded healers.

DAY 40

Holy Saturday



"The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb," by Hans Holbein the Younger, 1521, Kunstmuseum, Basel.

(Silence)



New Gardener, by Janpeter Muilwijk (Dutch, 1960–), 2017

Easter Monday: Alleluia!

*"The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.
Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."
Isaiah 58:11-12*

Isaiah 58 is one of the richest feasts of scripture. If you aren't familiar with it, consider sitting at this table on your own timetable. Biblical theology, art, quotes, saints, prayer exercises, and stories of actual current work is embedded in these 40 pieces of content. Our team of writers is theologically trained, inter-generational including young Anglicans, have "dirt under their nails" (quote by Herb+ Bailey), and are leaders of nonprofits and parish based ministries. This is worth your time in the next weeks and months, and worth sharing with others.

Here's a Summary:

Days 5-10: Might we be able to prevent human trafficking?

Days 11-16: Who are the food insecure in North America?

Day 17-22: What are the forms of home instability?

Day 23-28: How can we best care for creation?

Day 29-34: What can we do about fragile neighborhoods?

DAY ??

Flourish: *(of a person, animal, or other living organism) to grow or develop in a healthy or robust way, especially as the result of a particularly favorable environment*

Flourishing: *(intransitive verb) to grow luxuriously*

We now enter into the glorious joy of Eastertide. Christos Anesti! He is risen indeed! But we live in the already--not yet of the kingdom of God. Until that day when God's dwelling place is with his people, and we see him face to face, we still contend for shalom.

We are called to be contemplative activists, to lean in and learn, to pray, and to be his hands and feet. Anglicans have always done this work, and we will continue to do this work, 'till he brings his shalom in all its fullness, and we contend no more.

Shalom: *refers biblically to a state of wholeness, completeness, and well-being in all aspects of life—personal, social, economic, and spiritual. It is both individual and the ecosystems around each person. Biblically associated terms are mishpat and (k)hesed, which are richer words than our English translations of compassion and mercy. These words in scripture connote a richness of vision and a vigorous thriving into that vision.*

Endnotes

¹ This phrase is from Orthodox bishop Alexander Schmemmann, in his book, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha*.

² Adapted from a prayer by World Vision.

³ Prayer from the USCCB handout for World Day of Peace 2015.

⁴ Statistical sources: Food Banks of Canada, Catholic Campaign for Human Development establish by The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Mark R. Rank from the University of Washington St Louis, Karen Carlson at debt.org, and Confronting Poverty.

⁵ From EducationforJustice.org

⁶ From the M25i White Paper on Homelessness

⁷ A Rocha's origins lie within the Evangelical Christian movement as reflected in their foundational Basis of Faith. Within A Rocha's leadership, they welcome those of all Christian traditions who accept the A Rocha Commitment to Creation Care.

⁸ A Rocha works with a range of national and global denominations and networks. In addition, they partner fully in practical action to care for God's world with those of other faiths and none, and with scientific and environmental organizations.

⁹ [The Lupton Center](#), [The Opportunity Atlas](#)

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, which has collected data for 100 years from individuals, Government agencies, and private sector organizations

¹¹ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight



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