

A decorative border of various flowers, including dahlias and lilies, in shades of orange and brown, framing the central text.

Bless the Lent we Actually Have

**40 DAYS TO REFLECT, PRAY, AND
BLESS OUR IMPERFECT LIVES**



An Invitation

Sometimes we wait. Spiritually, I mean. We just wait. And wait. Maybe something will happen?

In the meantime, our days are complicated by feelings that don't seem altogether very spiritual. Deep annoyance. Rehearsals of old fights. Anger at friends who are, in our defense, pretty frustrating sometimes. Our bodies ache. We are consumed by somebody else's problems, and we are fairly certain their lives are rushing toward despair.

So we wait. At least I do. I assume that in some future day I will feel the truth of my spiritual belief that God is with us. That God never leaves. That God's presence is best (and I can't prove that this is theologically true) on bad days. When life is headed downhill, I tend to wait.

When Lent rolls around every year, we are offered a chance to stop waiting. We are in the part of the story when Jesus is an arrow pointed straight at his own end. He will die. But first he will suffer and be betrayed; religious and political structures will conspire and conform to great evil; nothing will be peace on earth or goodwill to all humankind. No wise men and starry nights. It's misery. And it should make

us pause. *That* is where we meet Jesus. We meet him on his way down.

Lent is our annual rehearsal of the cosmic moment when Jesus' suffering and death and resurrection will change how we experience death. Death will not be the defining truth about us. Someday we will be freed from the gorgeous and horrible limitations of our human lives, and we will live forever with God (which is VERY DIFFICULT FOR ME TO IMAGINE. But it's the truth.). But first Jesus suffers and dies. We walk with him. And he walks with us.

Jesus will walk with us through whatever kind of Lenten day you are having. The lovely one. The garbage one. The one that barely seems like it counted at all. As we toggle through every kind of emotion—boredom, devastation, happiness, irritation—we want to say: *bless this Lent.*

This little guide is your invitation to bless whatever this season is actually bringing you. So let's stop waiting. This is the one we have. Let's bless it all.

For Ash Wednesday

Read:

“For Ash Wednesday” from **page 200** of
The Lives We Actually Have

[Psalm](#)
[51:1-17](#)

“Do you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?”

— Rev. Jan Richardson

Ask

Check in today. Are you feeling more durable or more fragile?
What do you need to be reminded of in your durability? In your
fragility?

Listen

The Rev. Liz Tichenor spoke to Kate about her profound Ash
Wednesday experience when she was reminded of the power of
community in times of great grief.



LISTEN HERE



01

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, on my best days when I feel capable and unwavering, remind me of my dependence on you. And on the days when I feel inside out with inadequacies and anxieties, remind me of your enoughness for today. Though my days and moods and fears and circumstances seem always in flux, you remain. Amen.

For This Beautiful, Limited Day

Read:

“For this beautiful, limited day” from
page 174 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Matthew](#)
[11:25-29](#)

Ask

In all our to-do lists and adulting, inboxes and carpool lanes, we can lose sight of what really matters. Reflect on the question that today’s blessing wonders: “Am I counting items instead of knowing what counts?” Do you find yourself more concerned with counting items or knowing what counts?

Do

Think of a practice that brings you rest like Jesus describes in Matthew 11:25-29. Yoga or pickle ball. Make-believe game with a kid in your life. Writing snail mail to a friend you haven’t seen in a while. Dancing to your favorite song. Hitting snooze for five extra minutes. Try one today as a reminder that the value of a day is more than the sum of your productivity.



PRAY:

God, today feels like a great undoing. There is too much to do and not enough of me to go around. For my overwhelm, give me peace. For my exhaustion, find me rest. For my resentment, love. And for my frustration at the never-enoughness, pull me in. Amen.

For Learning to Delight Again

Read:

“For learning to delight again” from
page 176 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm
36:5-9](#)

“Joy is a mystery because it can happen anywhere, anytime, even under the most unpromising circumstances, even in the midst of suffering, with tears in its eyes.”

— Frederick Buechner

Ask

Take inventory. How easy does experiencing joy feel today? Possible? Impossible? What simple pleasures might you sip from, as a refuge in the shadow of God’s wings?

Reflect

Read Mary Oliver’s poem, “The Summer Day” and reflect on her question: “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” What do you think Mary Oliver would suggest doing?



PRAY:

God, let the smallness of this place become a refuge for me, a resting place under the shadow of your wings, so that just for a moment I might awaken to delight once again. Lord, thank you, that even the tiniest of pleasures tell me a gorgeous story about you, and about your love. Amen.

For When You Need to Hold On or Let Go

Read:

“For when you need to hold on or let go”
from **page 178** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm
63:1-8](#)

Ask

What is the good that you hunger for today? What is the thing you know you want to release?

Listen

Learning to “let go” sounds wonderful if what you’re carrying is a heavy addiction, unforgiveness, or failure. But what if we’re holding on to so much that we can’t live without—a sick kid, an aging parent, or our own fragile hearts? Listen to Father Richard Rohr explain the strange math of knowing when to hold on and when to let go.



[LISTEN HERE](#)



02

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, help me pry my fingers off, one by one, and let go of what I know does not actually help or satisfy. Awaken my desire to the place where You will meet me, Oh Lord, in Your beauty and goodness. And help me return again and again to this ebb and flow that is life-giving. Amen.

The First Sunday

A Mini-Easter

“

Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, “This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the Law. Then Nehemiah told them, “Go and eat what is rich, drink what is sweet, and send out portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

— **Nehemiah 8:9-10**



In the midst of Lent, as we inch toward the darkness and sorrow of the cross, there are regular parties. Every Sunday, we get to take a pause and celebrate a mini-Easter. So today, search around inside, rummage through the stuff of gloom and penitence, and find those Eastery feelings that are longing to come out. Splurge a little as a symbol of God’s extravagant love. And be sure to cast aside any Lenten practices. Sundays are Feast Days.

HOLY WEEK & EASTER

AT ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Holy Week is a time to reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Remembering Jesus' actions, reflecting on his messages and recommitting to living as his disciples in the world today. The Triduum marks the three-part worship of Holy Week which takes us to the final days of Jesus life, crucifixion, and resurrection.

We hope this schedule helps you plan to observe these important days, both on your own and with others. May you have a blessed Holy Week and Easter.

Palm Sunday | March 24, 2024

8:00 AM Holy Eucharist in the Chapel

10:00 AM Holy Eucharist in the Church

The Triduum

Maundy Thursday | March 28, 2024

7:00 PM in the Parish Hall and Church

Good Friday | March 29, 2024

12:00 PM in the Church

Easter Vigil | March 31, 2024

5:30 AM in the Labyrinth and Church

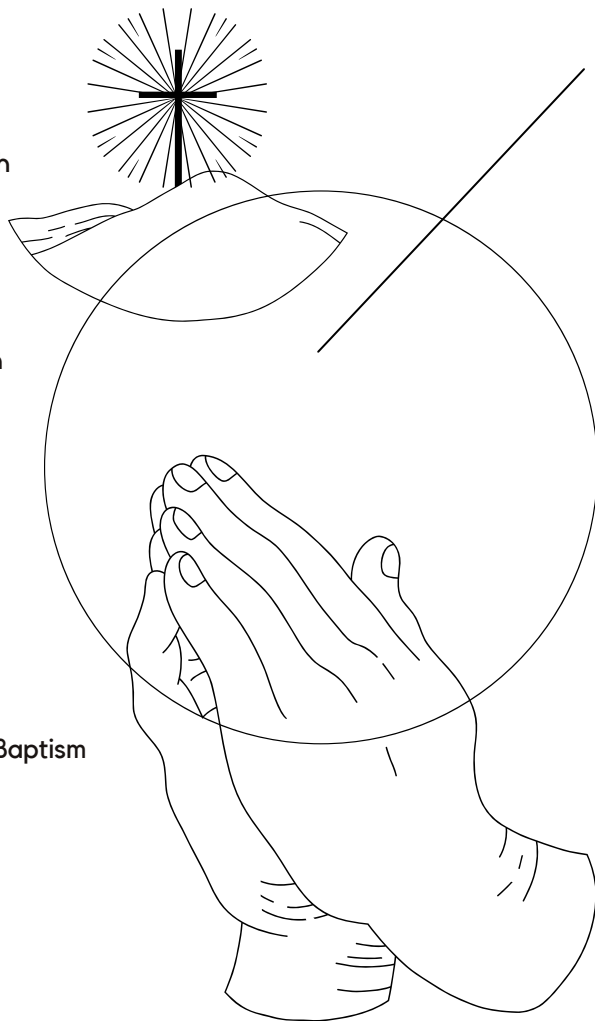
Easter Sunday | March 31, 2024

8:00 AM Brunch in the Parish Hall

10:00 AM Easter Eucharist with Holy Baptism



saint mark's
episcopal church



For an Unfinishable Day

Read:

“For an unfinishable day” from **page 180**
of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[1 John](#)
[3:1-3](#)

Ask

“In this culture of more, more, more, make me less,” today’s blessing prays. Fill in the blank with your own answers to how you want to move against our culture’s exhausting pressures to be MORE:

In this culture of perfection, make me

_____.

In this culture of effortless success, make me

_____.

In this culture of judgment, make me

_____.

In this culture of _____,

make me _____.

Watch

Years ago, Kate took a day trip with her dad to see one of the crown jewels of Portuguese Catholic architecture, the towering Batalha Monastery. But the most striking part was a cathedral that was missing its roof. It was ornately decorated yet unfinished. And isn’t that the story of us all? Beautiful, striving, and never, ever done. Reflect on the ways that this unfinished cathedral shows us something about our imperfections.



PRAY:

God, I am grateful that when you look upon me, you see your very own creation, being made new in Christ. I love your eyes, God, seeing me this way. A work of your love. Amen.

For Beginnings and Endings

Read:

“For beginnings and endings” from
page 182 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Isaiah](#)
[43:16-21](#)

Ask

What changes (big or small) are you experiencing right now? What does this change feel like in your body (e.g. sweaty, butterflies, bubbly)?

Do

Make your own ritual to say goodbye to what you’re leaving behind. Throw a party or ceremony to honor for what was (e.g. the end of a relationship, retirement, a changed body). Light a candle, buy a flower and choose the color to represent what you are leaving behind, and throw it in the river. Say a prayer of thanks for the freedom that this change represents. And then open your heart for what is to come next.



PRAY:

Read today's blessing again (page 182 of The Lives We Actually Have), changing the word “we” to “I,” making it personal and specific to your situation. Spend some time asking God for the kind of courage or strength you need in this time of change. Conclude with a prayer of gratitude for what has led you here, and for what you are leaving behind.

For The Courage to Do Something Difficult

Read:

“For the courage to do something difficult”
from **page 184** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[John](#)
[16:33](#)

Ask

Take a step back from the difficult thing you know needs to be done, as if observing it from a distance. Ask, what do I know that is true about it? What do I have already to meet the need? What is the next first step to get it done? What’s stopping you from taking it?

Do

Give yourself a calendar for your hard thing. Perhaps today, you will acknowledge how hard it is for you. Tomorrow, you want to shove it in a drawer and forget about it. But the next day, you’ll take the next right step.



PRAY:

God, I want to be the kind of person that doesn't put off the hard thing. Give me courage, today, right now, to do what needs to be done or say what needs to be said. Infuse me with wisdom and grant me your peace that transcends understanding even (and especially) when I'm afraid. Amen.

For When We Want More

Read:

“For when we want more” from **page 186**
of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm](#)
[32](#)

Ask

The psalmist talks about how hiding our human-ness from God compounds it, but when we tell God the truth about our condition, God becomes the place of safety we had longed for. Secretly, honestly, and perhaps under a blanket, offer to God the “God-sized project” of being fully known and loved in all our imperfections.

Do

Draw a self-portrait (it doesn’t have to be good!). On the page, write down the things that make you, you. Maybe your kindness or stubbornness (for better or worse) or the way your nose crinkles when you smile. Take time to notice the humanity in your gifts and imperfections (that are sometimes gifts if we look close enough!).



PRAY:

Pray today’s blessing again (from page 184 of The Lives We Actually Have), and add a secret prayer of response to God that is yours alone.

For The Life You Didn't Choose

Read:

“For the life you didn’t choose” from
page **188** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm](#)
[46](#)

Ask

In the aftershock of sudden grief, in the tender place of wonder and dread, what part of Psalm 46 feels true for you?

Listen

Maintaining hope in the midst of the lives we didn’t choose can sometimes feel impossible. Sometimes it can help to look toward people who really get it—like Jay and Katherine Wolf. Listen to this tender conversation which offers a wide view of their story of hard-won hope.



LISTEN HERE



04

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, as I invite my soul to stillness, help me be aware that you are already present to me, and that you are here right now. Bless the stillness and the wordless wisdom that comes forward to my mind. Give me loving actions to do, that I might be for others in crisis, the presence that reminds them: You are held. You are safe. You are loved. You are loved. You are loved. Amen.

For Who You Might Become

Read:

“For who you might become” from
page 190 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[2 Cor.](#)
[4:16-18](#)

“You have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

— Augustine of Hippo

Ask

What period of time do you find yourself living in most—past, present, or future? What are the gifts and drawbacks of spending too much time in each? To where do you need to pull your attention today?

Reflect

Write a note of gratitude to your past self. Thank them for what they did with what they knew. (Sometimes it helps to have a picture of younger-you in front of you. Look at how cute you were!) Now, write a note to your future self. Thank them for the courage it takes to become someone new. (And tell them their hair looks great!) Whisper a word of thanks to God for who you are in this moment.

PRAY:

God, what if. What if I walk out on this ledge and feel only the taste of my fear? What if I discover that what I carry cannot be shouldered? What if I live too long without that feeling? That I can set this down. God, fill me with a love that staves off all the darkness. Comfort me when I can't think another reasonable thought. And if I can't, I mean, I just can't feel your nearness, hear you telling me that I am loved, send your armies of do-gooders, tuck my name inside their hearts. Give me people who love to hold more than this day can manage. And if you can't send more than one because more than one would be nice, just send the nearest person to take things out of my hands and into theirs until I know again today that I should never be expected to walk this road alone. Amen.

The Second Sunday

A Mini-Easter

Today is a Mini-Easter, which means we abstain from our Lenten practices and practice the act of feasting in the truth of the resurrected Christ. Make room for celebration today—even if it’s a quick shout of joy or a kitchen dance party to your favorite song.



For This Garbage Day

Read:

“For this garbage day” from **page 132**
of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm](#)
[88](#)

Ask

What is it like to be you right now? No need to be polite. Don't hold anything back. Now that you've spoken that truth, what are the tiny, tiny graces that are noticeable in the midst of the garbage parts? And if you can't do it, thank God for honest communication.

Do

Make a list of five things you are thankful for at this moment, but practice compressing your attention. The smaller the better. (When things were very bad, I could even say things like: “I hate this less than yesterday.” Don't worry about being honest!)



PRAY:

God, show me the life I actually have, the reality that is truest now—the whole of it. Let me hold the doubts and questions together with the graces that are here too. And in your kindness, help me begin to understand how to live more, with fewer explanations. Amen.

For When You Are Afraid

Read:

“For when you are afraid” from
page 134 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm
23](#)

Ask

How and where in your body does fear affect you? Ask God to comfort you there.

Reflect

Play the song, “The House of God, Forever” by Jon Foreman. What phrases, words, or themes do you need to cling to today?



[LISTEN HERE](#)



05

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)



PRAY:

Read today's blessing again, adding your own thoughts, feelings, questions, and needs. Be specific.

For When You Can't Love Yourself

Read:

“For when you can’t love yourself” from
page 138 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[John
10:10-11](#)

“Rejoice that you are what you are; for our Lord loves you very dearly.”

— Abbe Henri de Tourville

Ask

What would “life in all its fullness” look like for you?

Listen

What do you do with a world that is full of things to fear, people we won’t please, kids who die, and parents who don’t change? Writer Anne Lamott doesn’t sugar-coat a single terrible thing, but knows that we also need the kinds of truths we can stand on—like that we, warts and all, are loved and chosen by God.



LISTEN HERE



06

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, who do I need to become, now that this is the world we have and this is the people we are—holy, imperfect, sloppy, joyful, angry, irritated, tired, or maybe just hungry, loved and chosen. So let’s start there. Let’s be people together with all of our frayed edges, with the things we admit only to our best friends, with the people who are hard to love, impossible to forgive—beginning with ourselves. Amen.

For When You're Feeling Grouchy

Read:

“For when you're feeling grouchy” from page 140 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

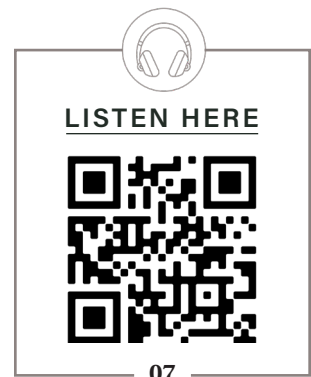
[Isaiah 43:1-7](#)

Ask

Redeemed. It's a word we use today only transactionally, like when we have a voucher we redeem for a discount. In Isaiah 43, the meaning is love in action. It is what God did through Jesus, whose dying became our living. Re-read this passage, inserting your name: “I have redeemed you, _____. I have called you by name, _____. You, _____, are mine.” Bring all your frustrations out into the light of this unconditional love for you.

Reflect

Listen to Mary Gauthier's song, “Mercy Now.” Where could you use a little mercy today? Where could you offer it to others?



OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, let me crawl up into your lap, and rest my head on your chest and hear you say to me again, “You are loved. You are safe. You are chosen.” Let me stay and stay and stay, knowing that this is that starting place. For everything. Amen.

For When You're Not Getting Any Better

Read:

“For when you’re not getting any better”
from **page 142** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm](#)
[131](#)

Ask

Where is contentment possible within the small space that is your life today?

Reflect

Listen to “Poetry” by Taylor Leonhardt. Reflect on Taylor’s lyrics—that you are God’s poetry. What does it mean to you to hear that the poet God doesn’t waste a word?



OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)



PRAY:

God, I want to believe that I am as precious and thoughtful to you as poetry. But my mind is racing to keep everything held together. Calm my mind from the things of tomorrow. Settle me in today. Help me find a place of contentment and peace right here, with you. Amen.

For When You Feel Stuck

Read:

“For when you feel stuck” from **page 148**
of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Rev](#)
[22:1-5](#)

“I do not understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us.”

— Anne Lamott

Ask

Being stuck may feel like living in a deserted place, with no landmarks and no map. The river of the water of life and the beauty of the garden might feel unattainable. But don't forget that it flows underground. Ask yourself, what do I already know of love, even here? How can I send down roots into the hidden places where love still lives?

Do

When we are stuck spiritually or emotionally, we could use a spiritual reset, but we often can't engineer it for ourselves. If we could, we would! But what we can do is to use our physical bodies to playfully disrupt our habits. We can deliberately switch things up, to see how unclenching from our patterns can create new ones. For example, if you usually sit down to pray, then stand or walk or kneel or lie face down on the floor. Or get into a pool or bathtub and float through your prayers. Somehow, changing one thing can lead to the sense that other things are possible.



PRAY:

God, release what is stuck, and let all that I am holding flow into the vast ocean of your love. Let all that I desire flow to your heart of compassion. Let all that I long to do mingle with your power already at work in the world. Amen.

The Third Sunday

A Mini-Easter

Did you know that in the midst of Lent, toward the darkness and sorrow of the cross, there are regular parties? Every Sunday, we get to take a pause and celebrate a mini-Easter. So today, search around inside, rummage through the stuff of gloom and penitence, and find those Eastery feelings that are longing to come out. Splurge a little as a symbol of God's extravagant love. And be sure to cast aside any Lenten practices. Sundays are Feast Days.



For This Overwhelming Day

Read:

“For this overwhelming day” from
page 90 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Luke
10:38-42](#)

“It is the narrowness
of the riverbanks,
after all, that gives
strength to the river.”

— Rob Des Cotes

Ask

Do you feel pressure to do more, be more? What happens in your body, mind, or spirit when you are running low on time, energy, or resources? In what situations are you tempted to override the awareness and keep pressing on, despite consequences?

Listen

We are limited beings, but often the idea of saying “no” can feel uncomfortable. Melissa Urban’s (CEO of The Whole30) experience of chronic illness forced her to accept her body’s limitations. She teaches how to set healthy boundaries as a way to protect our relationships, manage our limited capacity (especially for those of us navigating chronic pain or illness or caregiving), and remind ourselves of our inherent worth (regardless of how much you can do).



LISTEN HERE



09

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, show me the contours of what is mine to hold, and mine to do. Help me with the discomfort, the push-pull of recognizing my limitations and working within them in a way that is creative and sustainable. And connect me to others so it is fruitful for all of us. Amen.

For When You Can't Catch a Break

Read:

“For when you can’t catch a break” from
page 92 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm](#)
[57](#)

Ask

Check in with yourself. Are you at high capacity—I feel able to juggle everything on my plate—or low capacity—I don’t have the energy to do it all today? Given today’s reality, is there anything you can take yourself off the hook for, ask for help completing, or punt to another day? Or, if you are feeling high capacity, is there something you could take off someone else’s plate to help them out?

Listen

The obligations never stop, do they? How do we get off the achievement train and build a beautiful life within constraints? Writer Shauna Niequist was on the fast track to burnout when she received advice that changed the pace of her life entirely. Listen to Kate and Shauna talk about the productivity myths we believe and how to embrace a slower, smaller life marked by delight. What do you notice about the cues that made Shauna aware that burnout was at hand?



OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, I see it, the truth that you made me in love, for love, so I’m letting you into all the places within me. The glad places, the needy places, the sad places, the overwhelmed places, and the awful places. Come there too, and rearrange any furniture you like. Clean up any messiness. I see now that I really want that, because the transformation is what will unfold more of what I am meant to be, your child—no matter how old I get—looking more like you every day. Amen.

For When You Suffer Alone

Read:

“For when you suffer alone” from
page 98 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm](#)
[25:16-17](#)

Ask

If loneliness or loss could be felt as a specific pain in a specific part of your body, where would you feel it? In your stomach? Your throat? Just take a few minutes to notice.

Reflect

Pray the breath prayer below for yourself, sensing the truth of your situation, and peace that comes when it is fully acknowledged and shared. Then turn your thoughts to someone else who may be feeling lonely, and pray the breath prayer for that person. Sit awhile calmly with the awareness of their situation. Perhaps something will come to mind as to how you could reach out to them.



PRAY A BREATH PRAYER:

*Inhale: God, turn to me and be gracious to me,
Inhale: Relieve the troubles of my heart,*

*Exhale: for I am lonely and afflicted.
Exhale: and free me from my anguish.*

For When the Road Is Long

Read:

“For when the road is long” from
page 102 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm](#)
[81](#)

Ask

The Psalmist speaks of the nourishment God desires to give, saying “open your mouth wide, and I will fill it...with the finest of wheat, with honey from the rock I would satisfy you” (verses 10, 16). But sometimes we are too tired to eat. How might rest be yours until you can open up for what would satisfy?

Reflect

Listen to “Psalm 34” by The Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, noticing the theme of “O Taste and See.” Allow the words to wash over you. What truth of God do you need to savor today?



OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

Dear God, I am so tired, body and soul. What I need most is rest, true rest that curls up in the cup of your hand until the refreshment comes. Keep me from running off to do whatever seems pressing. Rest your hand on me so I begin to trust that the first thing is actually rest. And the second thing, and the third. Then God, feed me with honey from the rock. Amen.

For When You Feel Forgotten by God

Read:

“For when you feel forgotten by God”
from **page 106** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

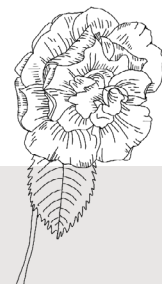
[Psalm](#)
[13](#)

Ask

The psalmist says, “I am shaken” (Psalm 13:4, ESV). Is this true in your life?

Do

Make a list of the people, places, circumstances in your life and in the lives of your family, friends, and community that are aching for restoration. Pray the words of Numbers 6:24-26 over your list—if you have the extra time, do it name by name. (E.g., “The Lord bless and keep INSERT NAME. The Lord make his face shine upon INSERT NAME, and be gracious to INSERT NAME. The Lord lift up his countenance upon INSERT NAME, and give INSERT NAME peace.”)



PRAY A BREATH PRAYER FROM PSALM 13:

Inhale: I am shaken,

Exhale: but I trust in your steadfast love.

For When It Is Too Much To Handle

Read:

“For when it is too much to handle”
from **page 108** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm](#)
[56](#)

Ask

Psalm 56, making a list of all the emotions the psalmist describes.

Reflect

Listen to this choral arrangement of “O let all who thirst, let them come to the water.” Bring your whole thirsty self, remembering that God invites you to come just as you are. God models for us the giving of unconditional love, that we also may learn to make room for others, just as they are.



[LISTEN HERE](#)



12

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

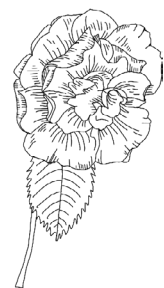
PRAY:

God, I need Your loving kindness in this tender place. Come and sit with me as I allow myself to name all that is so hard, all that is so precious and yet so precarious that it makes me afraid. Comfort me. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday

A Mini-Easter

Today is a feast day, a mini-Easter. Take a break from the weight of Lent and let joy in.



For When Hope Seems Lost

Read:

“For when hope seems lost” from
page 120 of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Psalm](#)
[62](#)

“Weeping may
endure for a night,
but joy comes in the
morning.”

— Psalm 30:5, NKJV

Ask

The psalmist cycles through alternating thoughts of trust and distress. What are the movements of your heart today—are you leaning more toward trust or distrust? Hope or despair? Somewhere in the middle?

Listen

What do you do when all hope feels lost? Visual artist Lanecia Rouse Tinsley is no stranger to the hopelessness that comes with grief. We could all use a bit of what Lanecia calls, holy seeing. In this episode, Kate and Lanecia discuss how creativity can be an act of resistance and the hope she discovers on a blank canvas.



[LISTEN HERE](#)



13

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY A BREATH PRAYER BASED ON PSALM 62:

Inhale: Find rest, oh soul.

Exhale: My soul finds rest in God.

Inhale: Find hope, oh soul.

Exhale: My hope comes from God.

For When This Pain Doesn't Make Sense

Read:

“For when this pain doesn't make sense”
from **page 122** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Isaiah
53:1-6](#)

Ask

Isaiah 56 speaks prophetically of Jesus who knows pain from the inside out. How does it feel when you first realize that the person you are talking to really knows and understands your pain?

Listen

Why doesn't God fix our pain? Listen in to hear world-renowned theologian Stanley Hauerwas' thoughts about why Christians are not exempt from difficult circumstances. He gives the best advice: “The ability to live well is the ability to live without so many reasons.”



[LISTEN HERE](#)



14

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

*Read the last half of today's blessing for yourself or for someone else:
“God, make this pain matter...”*

For When You're Tired of Broken Systems

Read:

“For when you’re tired of broken systems”
from **page 124** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Isaiah](#)
[10:1-4](#)

Ask

What broken systems make you angry? How can you move beyond “thoughts and prayers” into action—even if it is a small action—today? What is in your power to control, fix, or heal?

Reflect

Audrey Assad rewrote “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Listen to her nonviolent version, “Your Peace Will Make Us One.” What line stands out most?



LISTEN HERE



15

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, don't let my anger turn inward. Let it flow out into the world as work done in love for the strong cause of justice. Show me the fight that is mine, and make me brave with the kind of power that is fully under your control and direction. Make me a channel of your peace! Amen.

For When You Need a Little Hope

Read:

“For when you need a little hope”
from **page 40** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Matthew
6:5-15](#)

Ask

Circle the words that best describe your relationship to prayer (any and all):

It comes easily.

It is difficult.

I always know what to say.

I never know what to say.

I don't think prayer works.

I think God listens.

Prayer makes me feel better.

I pray whatever comes to mind.

I prefer scripted prayers.

I pray when I don't know what else to do.

I pray to be changed by God.

I enjoy praying for myself.

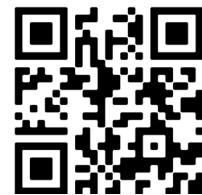
I enjoy praying for others.

Listen

We don't always know how to move through seasons when there is hope for someday, but someday is not now. Perhaps here, we need to learn how to pray. Jesuit priest Father James Martin describes how prayer is for everyone—believer, doubter, or no-thank you-er.



LISTEN HERE



16

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

Pray the words of The Lord's Prayer in Matthew 5:9-13 slowly, as if you are saying them for the first time. What stands out? What do you need, especially today? Settle on that part of the prayer and make it your own.

For When You're Hanging on by a Thread

Read:

“For when you're hanging on by a thread”
from **page 42** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Isaiah](#)
[55:1-3](#)

Ask

Can you remember a time when you were just barely hanging on? Maybe that is today. God says “Come, you who are thirsty, you who have nothing, come.”

Do

Grab a pen and paper. You are about to draw something—anything—that reminds you of your situation right now. Give yourself permission to be a little wild. No need to worry about representational accuracy! Just a playful drawing that maybe only you can recognize. (Yes, that IS a pickle in a jar. Don't you see it?) So now, all around that central image, draw or write what represents the resources you have right now, the help you have, the people you can call, the chocolate that is still in the back of the fridge. Now write the date at the top of the page. The resources you have are your starting point. What is possible here? Just for today.



PRAY:

God, in the calculus of what is possible, help me start with resources and work from there, not from the problem backwards with all the weight of it bearing down on me. What can I do that is actually sustainable? Show me in real time, as I go, because I'm feeling a little fuzzy in my thinking, so action is probably my best bet. Let's start there. Amen.

For Truth-Telling — However Bitter or Sweet

Read:

“For truth-telling — however bitter or sweet”
from **page 28** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Romans](#)
[12:9-15](#)

Ask

Think of a time when you were able to truly “weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice” (Romans 12:15). Think of someone who was able to do the same for you in a time of need. Thank God for the gift of being able to give and receive this kind of presence and compassion.

Reflect

Listen to this simple Taizé song “Stay With Me.” Let it represent the presence that brings comfort. These were the words of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he asked his friends to stay with him while he prayed about the cross he was about to face (Matthew 26:36-37). Think of a time you needed this same kind of loving-presence from people in your life.



LISTEN HERE



17

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, give me the freedom to be able to tell the truth to myself, and the gift of someone who will listen to it. But God, when I have to say hard truths to someone, help me slow it down and prepare them, invite them. God, let my truth come gently. Amen.

The Fifth Sunday

A Mini-Easter

Happy Mini-Easter, my dear. Take a break from any sad, heavy feelings (even if just for a moment). And do something that makes you feel buoyed by gladness



For When So Many Are Suffering

(and You Don't Know What to Do)

Read:

“For when so many are suffering”
from **page 156** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[John](#)
[11:1-45](#)

Ask

Re-read John 11:1-45, but place yourself in the scene. Where are you standing? What do you see? What emotion bubbles up? Imagine what it would have been like to have been there, to see Jesus' tears for his friend. This is the face of God's compassion for us in our sorrow.

Do

Pull out a piece of paper or a notebook. Make a list of the people in your life in desperate need of healing or hope—of all those you know who are suffering right now.



PRAY:

Just speak the names you listed aloud to God. No need to fill in any details if you don't want to. God knows. It's a way to overcome the feeling that you can't possibly make a big enough difference to help all the sick ones, the hurting ones in your awareness. God hears you.

For The Ones Who Choose to Break their Hearts for Ours

Read:

“For the ones who choose to break their hearts for ours” from **page 158** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Isaiah 58:6-9](#)

Ask

Isaiah 58:6-9 describes the religious act of fasting as intrinsically linked to action. Do you imagine the religious acts you practice (prayer, fasting, giving, worship, attending church) as more for you or for others—or maybe both?

Listen

Certain people decide to make other people’s pain their own. Gary Haugen, founder and CEO of International Justice Mission, is one of those people. But how do you sustain heartbreaking work? “Joy,” Gary says, “is the oxygen for doing hard things.” Listen here and be encouraged:

“Compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural but is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness.

— Walter Brueggemann



LISTEN HERE



18

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

God, show me the gift I have to offer others. Blow your winds of love all around my efforts, so they have that whiff of joy about them. Amen.

For The Ones Who Bear Witness

Read:

“For the ones who bear witness”
from **page 160** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Acts
1:7-9](#)

Ask

Jesus’ friends were those who followed so closely, they knew every one of his ways. They were witnesses to the big stuff—his miracles, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension into heaven. But also the little details too—how he parted his hair, his lunchtime preferences, and the face he made when he was really upset. Think of one close person in your life—your best friend, your child, a partner, or co-worker. What are the quirky and individual and irreplaceable things you love about them?

Listen

Bestselling novelist Ann Patchett knows how to walk right up to the edge with people she loves. She is the friend who sits with you during chemo, or lets you spill your secrets in the car. She shares what powerful lessons she learned early on about how to approach suffering with humility, knowing you can rarely change a life, but you can be there to witness and be amazed.

“Death always thinks of us eventually. The trick is to find the joy in the interim, and make good use of the days we have.”

— Ann Patchett, *These Precious Days*



LISTEN HERE



19

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

O God, I love that you know me completely, and that you make it possible for me to know you through Jesus Christ. Thank you that you sent your Holy Spirit to be with us, through these precious days. Show us how to move through them as those who are truly alive. As witnesses to you, with your joy shining through. Amen.

For When Loving Your Enemy Seems Too Big an Ask

Read:

“For when loving your enemy seems too big an ask” from **page 164** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Matthew 5:43-48](#)

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only Light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only Love can do that.”

— Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Ask

Who is your enemy or arch nemesis? Maybe a rude neighbor or that &\$%! who cut you off in traffic. Or maybe it is a sibling or in-law you can't seem to forgive. That colleague who wronged you or that friend you always seem to be competing with. Hold their name (or face, if you can bear it) in your mind.

Reflect

Madeleine L'Engle said, “We must bless without wanting to manipulate. Without insisting that everything be straightened out right now. Without insisting that our truth be known. This means simply turning whoever it is we need to bless over to God, knowing that God's powerful love will do what our own feeble love or lack of it won't. I have suggested that it is a good practice to believe in six impossible things every morning before breakfast, like the White Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*. It is also salutary to bless six people I don't much like every morning before breakfast.” Try blessing your enemy today. How did that make you feel?



PRAY:

Read today's blessing again and make it a prayer, with this particular enemy in mind.

For the Givers Who Need to Receive

Read:

“For the givers who need to receive”
from **page 168** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Acts
20:32-36](#)

Ask

When you read today’s blessing, did someone come to mind who needs this kind of support? Or perhaps it’s you? How can you show support to them today?

Do

Think of what would feel like support to the person you thought of and do it. Send an encouraging text or a coffee gift card. Offer to mow their lawn or drop off a meal. If you’re the one in need of support, will you tell a friend how they could be supportive of you today? It can feel difficult to ask for what we need, but shouldering one another’s burdens is what can help get us through sometimes.



PRAY:

God, help me be open to see the suffering around me. Give me the willingness to come close, and be with them right there in the hard place. Show me what’s important in their world right now, and please give me the words to say, or perhaps even just the quality of silence that is most meaningful. Amen.

For Your Great, Big, Dumb Heart

Read:

“For your great, big, dumb heart”
from **page 170** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[John](#)
[15:9-17](#)

Ask

Think of someone whose love for you made a huge difference. Maybe it was a grandparent or teacher, friend or pastor. What about their love felt transformative?

Do

Write a little Valentine’s note for the person you thought of in the previous question. (Yes, I know it’s a little late for a Valentine’s card.) It can be someone who is no longer with us or someone you have lost touch with. The act of writing the card is as important as the act of sending it. Express to them the way you felt changed by their love. How did it feel to be loved like that?



PRAY:

Thank you, God, that your love ever reached me, and for that person who first brought it to me through their love beyond limits. I knew even then that this was different. Important. Irreplaceable. God, help me be that difference for someone else. Amen.

The Sixth Sunday

Palm Sunday - Mini Easter

This Sunday is another Mini-Easter. It is also the day we celebrate Palm Sunday—when Jesus entered Jerusalem. Read the story found in John 12:12-18. Put yourself in the story. Who are you? What are you experiencing? What emotions do you feel? Then read “For Palm Sunday” on page 202 in *The Lives We Actually Have*.



For the Courage to Try ... and the Wisdom to Know When to Stop

Read:

“For the courage to try” from **page 72** of
The Lives We Actually Have

[Matthew
26:38-39](#)

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference”

— The Serenity Prayer

Ask

In his prayer towards the end of Passion week, Jesus stared down the reality that he hoped would not have to come to pass. What is it that you are facing? Express it to God, knowing God can handle your honesty.

Listen

Katie Couric was at the top of her career as a television anchor when her young husband died unexpectedly from colon cancer. She has so much to teach us about what happens when our problems cannot be easily solved—no matter how hard we try. She shares candidly about the lengths she went to avoid grief, but why she had to learn to face it nonetheless. We need the courage to try (and the wisdom to stop).



LISTEN HERE



20

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

Lord Jesus, I want to walk with you through this week, to be present to the tumult of all that you experienced, to wait with you, to watch as rough hands took hold of your all too human flesh, as you experienced betrayal and rejection. Let me see you, and weep that such a thing ever happened to you, O spotless Lamb. Amen.

For Collective Grief

Read:

“For collective grief” from **page 74** of
The Lives We Actually Have

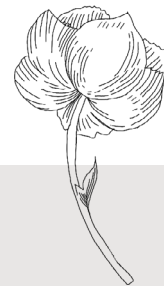
[Psalm](#)
[137:1-6](#)

Ask

Today’s blessing says, “Blessed are we who ask and wait, and ask again for answers that may not come, for hope that seems hard to find, for comfort that is not easily found.” What are the answers you wait for, that may not come?

Do

Right now, people across the country and world are feeling collective grief on many different scales. The grief that comes with the loss of those who have died due to COVID-19. The war in Ukraine. And too often, we wake to the news of another mass shooting. Getting involved in your community—even in small ways—can help the collective grieving process. Consider the ways in which your community needs to heal. Are there ways you can help and get involved? Our team loves the work of [Together Rising](#) who “transforms collective heartbreak into effective action.”



PRAY:

Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings. Amen. (Psalm 61:1-4)

For the Day of Mourning

Read:

“For the day of mourning from **page 76** of
The Lives We Actually Have

[Psalm](#)
[22](#)

Ask

What are you grieving, my dear? Big or small—lay out the whole of it all. No tear goes unnoticed.

Do

Food has a beautiful way of making us feel less lonely in our pain or in our isolation or in our grief. My friend, Kendall Vanderslice, founded the nonprofit, Edible Theology, founded on the belief that deep healing and connection takes place best over food and at a table. Kendall says, “Every time I bake, I am reminded that death is necessary for resurrection. The tartness of sourdough is a sharp reminder that when wheat, or dough, or beloved friends die, by God’s mercy they bear much fruit.” [Click here to listen to Kitchen Meditations with Kendall Vanderslice](#), stories of how God meets us at the kitchen and at the table. And who knows, maybe you will bake something delicious today.



PRAY:

God, there’s pain now. Awaken me to what it is, that I might lean into it a little closer. Help me see what it is, and understand a little more about the nature of what is hurting—in my mind, in my body. Give me words for it, that I might see a way through it, or around it. Give me courage to somehow live here, right where I am, but also wide awake to where I might bravely go. O God of all compassion, help me, lead me. Amen.

For Maundy Thursday

Read:

“For Maundy Thursday” from **page 204** of
The Lives We Actually Have

[Matthew](#)
[26:1-30](#)

Ask

Honoring Jesus while he was near, that was the beauty of the lavish gift outpoured. How can the remembrance of this woman’s loving act guide you this day?

Reflect

This ancient Latin hymn “Humbly We Adore Thee” is about the sharing of the bread and the cup at the Last Supper. It has a beautiful English translation, given below, and you can follow it as you listen to this sublime recording:

*Christ, our God and brother Hear our humble plea; By this holy banquet Keep us joined to Thee.
Humbly we adore Thee, Christ Redeemer King, Thou art Lord of Heaven, Thou to whom we sing.
God, the mighty, thou hast come, Bearing gifts of grace; Son of Adam, still thou art, Saviour of
our race. Jesus, Lord, we thank Thee For this wondrous bread; In our land Thou dwellest, By
Thee we are fed. We who share this mystery, In thee are made one; Ev’ry act we offer thee In Thy
name is done. Thou who died to save us, Live on as our light; Though our eyes are blinded, Yet
our faith gives sight. Christ, do thou be merciful; Lamb for sinners slain; We in grief confess our
guilt; Cleanse our souls of stain.*



[LISTEN HERE](#)



21

OR IN THE [SPOTIFY PLAYLIST](#)

PRAY:

My Jesus, I love you. I pour out all my adoration as oil upon your feet. All my gratitude. All my joy. I come hoping to receive from you the food I need. Fill me with your very self, that I may live as one satisfied, and able to nourish and care for others with the kind of sustaining love you have for me. Amen.

For Good Friday

Read:

“For Good Friday” from **page 206** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Luke 23:1-47](#)

Ask

What kind of love is this? Consider this question as you read the account in Luke 23:1-47.

Do

Attend a Good Friday service at a local church or online. Good Friday is a powerful day of truth telling and honesty. It’s the ultimate moment of God’s condescension. If you’ve ever wondered how far God would go to be with us, this is it. All the way to the end. “I asked Jesus, ‘How much do you love me?’ And Jesus said, ‘This much.’ Then he stretched out His arms and died.” —Author unknown



PRAY:

God, draw me to the cross, there to stand with the others whose love for you feels the weight of it as loss, as grief. Your enemies thought they could end what you were doing, and render you powerless. Little did they know that love never fails. Show me again the truth of all that happened here. Amen.

For Holy Saturday

Read:

“For Holy Saturday”
from **page 208** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[Matthew
27:57-66](#)

“Blessed are those
who mourn, for they
shall be comforted.”

— **Matthew 5:4, NRSV**

Ask

The Harrowing of Hell is celebrated today on Holy Saturday. The day when tradition affirms that Jesus descended into hell, showing us that there is no place you can go where God will not find you and lead you home. All the scars that cover us, all the wounds that we have inflicted on others, all the pain that you carry—don’t matter in the end. All our dirt will be cleansed, our incisions healed, our grief wiped away. Nobody who wants to go with him gets left behind. Reflect on that truth. What does the depth of Holy Saturday mean to you today?

Reflect

The Harrowing of Hell is often depicted in art. Look up the icon [“Descent to Hell,”](#) written by Duccio Di Buoninsegna in 1308-11. Notice how Jesus is pulling Adam by the hand. Reflect on this painting. What else do you see? What does this painting stir up in you?



PRAY:

God, come find me in the places I’m a little lost and don’t know it. Help me in my honest questioning, my earnest longings, and lead me home. Amen.

For Easter Sunday

Read:

“For Easter Sunday” from **page 210** of *The Lives We Actually Have*

[John
20:1-30](#)

Ask

The Apostle John says in verse 30 that many things Jesus did and said are not recorded in scripture? What things would you like to have seen or read?

Do

Celebrate with Easter Joy! The season of Lent is over. How will you mark the move into Eastertide? What will you take with you from this Lenten journey?



PRAY:

God, let the truth of it sink in. You have overcome death! Help me find my alleluias, and let them rise from my throat with the raw immediacy of what this means. For me. For those who have gone before. Awaken me to shout and sing at the top of my voice! Christ is risen! Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Amen.