

The Poetry of Lent



First Presbyterian Church
LEWISTOWN

The Poetry of Lent



Welcome to The Poetry of Lent!

This booklet contains a variety of poetry from various sources, including modern and classic poetry. It's likely that you'll recognize some of the authors, though others will probably be new. I'm sharing some of my favorite poems, as well as some that I've found while compiling this resource. Some of these poems are written specifically for the season of Lent, some even through the lens of faith, but others are simply words of poetry that happen to be fitting for this season.

There's a reading for each day, beginning on Ash Wednesday and continuing through Easter Monday. And while you will notice that a few poems were chosen for a particular day, based on where we find ourselves in Lent or the scripture being read in worship, most days are simply poems fitting for the season of Lent.

My hope is that this resource, and the words it contains, offer an invitation to slow down and experience Lent in a new way. You might find that some poems are hard to understand or perhaps don't speak to you, and that's okay. I hope there will be others that come alive for you!

Above all, I hope the words on these pages will draw you closer to God as we journey together towards Easter.

March 5 - Ash Wednesday

Rend Your Heart

by Jan Richardson

To receive this blessing,
all you have to do
is let your heart break.

Let it crack open.

Let it fall apart so you can see
its secret chambers,
the hidden spaces
where you have hesitated
to go.

Your entire life
is here, inscribed whole
upon your heart's walls:
every path taken or left behind,
every face you turned toward
or turned away,
every word spoken in love
or in rage,
every line of your life
you would prefer to leave
in shadow,
every story that shimmers
with treasures known
and those you have yet
to find.

It could take you days
to wander these rooms.

Forty, at least.

And so let this be
a season for wandering,
for trusting the breaking,
for tracing the rupture
that will return you
to the One who waits,
who watches,
who works within
the rending
to make your heart
whole.

March 6

Looking Toward Jerusalem

by Ann Weems

The journey to Bethlehem
was much more to my liking.
I am content kneeling here,
where there's an aura of angels
and the ever-present
procession
of shepherds and of kings
who've come to kneel to the
Newborn
in whom we are newborn.

I want to linger here in
Bethlehem
in joy and celebration,
knowing once I set my feet
toward Jerusalem,
the Child will grow,
and I will be asked to follow.

The time of Light and Angels
is drawing to a close.
Just when I've settled
contentedly
into the quiet wonder of Star
and Child,
He bids me leave
and follow.

How can I be expected to go
back
into darkness
after sitting mangersonside,
bathed in such Light?

It's hard to get away
this time of year;
I don't know how I'll manage.
It's not just the time ...
the conversation along the way
turns from Birth to Death.
I'm not sure I can stand
the stress and pain;
I have enough of those already.
Besides, I've found the lighting
on the road to Jerusalem
is very poor.
This time around, there is no
Star ...

The shepherds have left;
they've returned to hillside
and to sheep.
The Magi, too, have gone,
having been warned in a
dream,
as was Joseph,
who packed up his family and
fled.
If I stay in Bethlehem,
I stay alone.
God has gone on
toward Jerusalem.

March 7

Beloved Is Where We Begin

by Jan Richardson

If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.
Do not leave
without hearing
who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has traveled this path
before you.
Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find
it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what
this journey is for.
I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger,
from fear,
from hunger
or thirst,
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall
of the night.
But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.

I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.
I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid
only on a road
such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort
and strength,
that come alongside us
for no other cause
than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their
curious insistence
whisper our name:
Beloved.
Beloved.
Beloved.

March 8

We All Have Our Courtyards

by Ann Weems

We all have our courtyards,
those times and places we face
like Peter
when we must decide
to stand up and say
whether we know him or not.
Those crossroads in our lives,
when we go along with things as they are,
or we say, as Luther did,
Here I stand, I can do no other.
We all have our courtyards....
Lent is the time to prepare
for our courtyards,
the time to listen to who he says he is.
And he did, you know,
He did tell us who he is.
He is that one who brings good news to the poor,
freedom to the oppressed, sight to the blind...
that Holy One who said,
Follow me.
Feed my sheep.

March 9

God We Thank You for the Churches

by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

God, we thank you for the churches
that are sanctuaries here —
that give safety, love and refuge
to the ones who live in fear.
For our neighbors, God, are suffering,
and they're yearning to be free;
we give thanks for all the places
that give hospitality.

Christ, we thank you for your welcome
that tears walls and borders down,
that gives hope to people fleeing,
that helps churches stand their ground.
For our neighbors, Lord, are asking,
and they're wondering what we'll do.
May our churches give them welcome,
and so find we welcome you.

By your Spirit give us courage;
by your Spirit, keep us strong.
May we focus on your mercy;
may we sing your justice song.
For our neighbors are your children,
so prepare us, God, to be
safe and welcome sanctuaries
in your New Community.

A hymn sung to the tune "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"

March 10

Seeing God Everywhere

by Kate Bowler

This world feels solid,
through and through.
Nothing is more obvious
than who's in and who's out-
the numbers at the bottoms of these
credit card bills,
and the worry lines
around our eyes and mouths.
Just ask anyone.
Nothing is happening except headlines
and a new season on Netflix
and the rumbling of wars, near and far.
Then we squint.
There you are. Shimmering at the edges
of some extravagant act of love.
There you are. Quickening our steps
toward your surprising favorites:
the weak and poor and scared,
the lasts-becoming-firsts,
those who can't squeeze
through the eye of the needle.
There you are. Calling us strong
when we are weak.
Telling us to link arms
with those who suffer.
Explaining how justice
will invert the order of things.
The world feels solid,
through and through, God.
Help me squint and see you better.

March 11

For Lent, 1966

by Madeleine L'Engle

It is my Lent to break my Lent,
To eat what I would fast,
To know when slender strength is spent,
Take shelter from the blast
When I would run with wind and rain,
To sleep when I would watch.
It is my Lent to smile at pain
But not ignore its touch.
It is my Lent to listen well
When I would be alone,
To talk when I would rather dwell
In silence, turn from none
Who call on me, to try to see
That what is truly meant
It not my choice. If Christ's I'd be
It's thus I'll keep my Lent.

March 12

Storage

by Mary Oliver

When I moved from one house to another
there were many things I had no room
for. What does one do? I rented a storage
space. And filled it. Years passed.

Occasionally I went there and looked in,
but nothing happened, not a single
twinge of the heart.

As I grew older the things I cared
about grew fewer, but were more
important. So one day I undid the lock
and called the trash man. He took
everything.

I felt like the little donkey when
his burden is finally lifted. Things!
Burn them, burn them! Make a beautiful
fire! More room in your heart for love,
for the trees! For the birds who own
nothing—the reason they can fly.

March 13

A Song of Ascent

by Padraig O Tuama

This slope is not slippery
it is steep
and we
are at the feet
of a
great endeavour.

You need not fear
a dangerous descent.
because this ascent will
demand
enough
attention.

And if we slip
let us hope that
our grips
are
firm.

Our muscles will burn and ache.

In time,
perhaps we will find ourselves
upon a plateau
showing us
where we've come from
and
where we might be going
provided
we keep going.

March 14

I Go Among the Trees

by Wendell Berry

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
where I left them, asleep like cattle.
Then what is afraid of me comes
and lives a while in my sight.
What it fears in me leaves me,
and the fear of me leaves it.
It sings, and I hear its song.
Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.
What I fear in it leaves it,
and the fear of it leaves me.
It sings, and I hear its song.
After days of labor,
mute in my consternations,
I hear my song at last,
and I sing it. As we sing,
the day turns, the trees move.

March 15

Untitled

by Roger Hutchison

I wonder.

Who are you?

You look different than me.

I am afraid

Your clothes are torn and tattered.

I want to turn away.

You speak in a language different than mine.

I am confused.

I want to turn my back on you.

But I remain.

Your eyes - they captivate me.

They pull me in and I begin to sense a connection.

You bend down and make your mark in the sand.

I bend down and make my mark in the sand.

The lines intersect.

We are drawn together by a fish - a symbol of the One who calls us by
name.

I tell you my name.

You tell me yours.

We are family.

March 16

Jesus' Wondrous Words of Grace

by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

Jesus' wondrous words of grace
Welcome all to God's embrace:
Welcome if you're rich or poor,
If you're knocking at the door,
If you come from far away,
If you need a place to stay.
If you suffer want or pain,
You are welcome in God's reign!

Do you live in fear and doubt?
Do you seek to leave some out?
Do you think that some can't get
To the table God has set?
Think there is no room for you?
Jesus says you're welcome, too.
Think you're different, sinful, odd?
You are welcome, child of God!

Jesus says to all the church:
Welcome in the ones who search,
Welcome in the ones who mourn,
Welcome in the tired and worn,
Welcome those who live in fear,
Welcome in the sinners here.
As you do to these, you see,
So you also welcome me.

A hymn to the tune "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come"

March 17

for that unsettled feeling

by Kate Bowler

Fulfillment. Contentment. I swear
I've had it for a minute or two.
Every lovely feeling is made of sand today.
Peace slips through my cupped hands.
There's a version I keep hoping
for where every good memory is a brick
stacked up to wall out every pain,
every remorse, every stinging fear.
But it never works that way.
No matter what I do
to build up my reserves
I find myself at the mercy
of every new negative feeling.
Contentedness feels elusive.
Fulfillment feels inaccessible.
But ours is not a story built on emotion.
Sometimes we will feel
the truth of your love,
our purpose, our intense belongingness,
and the rest of the time
we will have to shrug
and wait for any settled feeling to return.
Our feelings come and go
but your stubborn love remains.
Your hope stays.
Your peace, when we reach for it,
will be placed in our hands
like a dove.
Settle me.
Slow my unsteady pulse.
Remind me that, even if I were to have
every "perfect" feeling,
the sheer fact that nothing lasts
is an enormous comfort right now.
This ache will pass.
You're here.
You're here.

March 18

Apostle

by Malcom Guite

An enemy whom God has made a friend,
A righteous man discounting righteousness,
Last to believe and first for God to send,
He found the fountain in the wilderness.
Thrown to the ground and raised at the same moment,
A prisoner who set his captors free,
A naked man with love his only garment,
A blinded man who helped the world to see,
A Jew who had been perfect in the law,
Blesses the flesh of every other race
And helps them see what the apostles saw;
The glory of the Lord in Jesus' face.
Strong in his weakness, joyful in his pains,
And bound by love, he freed us from our chains.

March 19

Making Peace

by Denise Levertov

A voice from the dark called out,
 'The poets must give us
Imagination of peace, to oust the intense, familiar
 Imagination of disaster. Peace, not only
 the absence of war.'
 But peace, like a poem,
 is not there ahead of itself,
can't be imagined before it is made,
 can't be known except
 in the words of its making,
 grammar of justice,
 syntax of mutual aid.
 A feeling towards it,
Dimly sensing a rhythm, is all we have
 until we begin to utter its metaphors,
 Learning them as we speak.
 A line of peace might appear
if we restructured the sentence our lives are making,
 revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,
 questioned our needs, allowed
 long pauses
 ...
A cadence of peace might balance its weight
on that different fulcrum; peace, a presence,
 an energy field more intense than war,
 might pulse then,
 stanza by stanza into the world,
 each act of living
 one of its words, each word
 a vibration of light—facets
 of the forming crystal.

March 20

Logos

by Mary Oliver

Why worry about the loaves and fishes?
If you say the right words, the wine expands.

 If you say them with love
 and the felt ferocity of that love
 and the felt necessity of that love,
 the fish explode into many.

 Imagine him, speaking,
 and don't worry about what is reality,
 or what is plain, or what is mysterious.
If you were there, it was all those things.
If you can imagine it, it is all those things.

 Eat, drink, be happy.

 Accept the miracle.

 Accept, too, each spoken word
 spoken with love.

March 21

A Light Exists in Spring

by Emily Dickinson

A Light exists in Spring
Not present on the Year
At any other period —
When March is scarcely here

A Color stands abroad
On Solitary Fields
That Science cannot overtake
But Human Nature feels.

It waits upon the Lawn,
It shows the furthest Tree
Upon the furthest Slope you know
It almost speaks to you.

Then as Horizons step
Or Noons report away
Without the Formula of sound
It passes and we stay —

A quality of loss
Affecting our Content
As Trade had suddenly encroached
Upon a Sacrament.

March 22

All Who Seek You

by Rainer Maria Rilke

All who seek you
test you.
And those who find you
bind you to image and gesture.
I would rather sense you
as the earth senses you.
In my ripening
ripens
what you are.
I need from you no tricks
to prove you exist.
Time, I know,
is other than you.
No miracles, please.
Just let your laws
become clearer
from generation to generation.

March 23

Slow Growth

by Sarah Speed, A Sanctified Art

There's a vine in the South that covers everything.
It chokes out the light. Grows up to twelve inches per day.

In a matter of years, it will blanket a forest.

If you saw it from space, you'd marvel at its reach.

If you saw it from the passenger seat, you'd weep at what it covers.

Those looking for fast shade plant this invasive vine.

Who can blame them? We're all impatient.

But if it's fruit you want—

the tart cherry,

the sticky sweet kumquat,

the soft side of a peach,

the crisp bite of an apple—

then bless the rain.

Thank the sun.

Put your hands in the dirt,

and wait.

March 24

Miracles

by Richard Jones

I need to witness miracles today—
a river turned to blood,
water become wine,
a burning coal touching the prophet's lips,
black ravens swooping down
to bring a starving man bread and meat,
a poor fisherman raising the dead!
I've heard theologians say
this is not the age of miracles,
but still, I'm easy to impress.
I don't need to climb out of the boat
and walk on water; I'd just like
to put my head on the pillow
while the storm still rages, and rest.

March 25

Grace

by Orlando Ricardo Menes

We cannot buy it in bulk at Trader Joe's,
Swap it for gold, or hoard shares of Grace, Inc.,
To hedge against bad luck. We acquire it
Without contract, promissory notes, or IOUs,
Neither codicils nor fine print. We gather
Grace safe from litigation or severance,
And though we might breach the strictures of creed,
It cannot be forfeited or suspended. Rather,
Grace is asymmetric, parabolic, skewed to love,
Immanent and absolute, but also unpredictable
As quantum particles, both here and there,
Both full and empty, so it might arrive
Inopportunistly and thus slip under hope,
Upsetting the earnest prayer, teasing our faith,
Like some rain bands, copious cumuli,
That appear astray, unbidden, in stagnant skies
To drench at last the drought-scourged earth.

March 26

finding God's presence

by Kate Bowler

God of all that we hardly notice,
ruler of the ground under our feet
and the sky stretched over our heads.
Send your spirit to direct our steps
and our thoughts
as we stumble around this day and night.
We have too much to do, so give us
enough silence to hear your voice.
We have too much to worry about,
so quiet us with a moment of your peace.
We have too much to carry,
so lighten our hearts with your love.
We are your people, eyes cast
down on the ground that you made,
wary that the sky will fall again.
Remind us again that above and below
you are here.

March 27

Some Questions You Might Ask

by Mary Oliver

Is the soul solid, like iron?
Or is it tender and breakable, like
the wings of a moth in the beak of the owl?
Who has it, and who doesn't?
I keep looking around me.
The face of the moose is as sad
as the face of Jesus.
The swan opens her white wings slowly.
In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness.
One question leads to another.
Does it have a shape? Like an iceberg?
Like the eye of a hummingbird?
Does it have one lung, like the snake and the scallop?
Why should I have it, and not the anteater
who loves her children?
Why should I have it, and not the camel?
Come to think of it, what about the maple trees?
What about the blue iris?
What about all the little stones, sitting alone in the moonlight?
What about roses, and lemons, and their shining leaves?
What about the grass?

March 28

God You Hear Our Weary Praying

by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

God, you hear our weary praying,
and you know that we lose heart.

All around we see the suffering
of a world that's torn apart.

We see leaders of the nations
filled with arrogance and greed.
We see friends and family hurting,
facing overwhelming need.

God, we cannot help but wonder:
Do our prayers do any good?
Do they change the nations' leaders?
Do they change our neighborhood?
Why do loved ones keep on suffering
when they're in our constant prayer?
Do you hear the cries we're offering?
Are you listening? Are you there?

Then you teach us of this woman:
She was widowed; she was poor.
"Grant me justice!" she kept calling
at an unjust judge's door.
Though that judge respected no one,
he was no match for her cries.
He responded to her pleading,
granting justice, changing lives.

How much more is your compassion!
God, you're just and good and fair.
May we lift to you our sorrows
and the burdens that we bear.
May we pray, for you reign o'er us!
May we ask — for you are kind!
May we trust that you will help us
in your goodness, in your time.

A hymn to the tune of "God Whose Giving Knows No Ending"

March 29

Dreams and Nightmares

by Walter Brueggemann

Last night as I lay sleeping,
I had a dream so fair . . .
I dreamed of the Holy City, well ordered and just.
I dreamed of a garden of paradise,
well-being all around and a good water supply.
I dreamed of disarmament and forgiveness,
and caring embrace for all those in need.
I dreamed of a coming time when death is no more.
Last night as I lay sleeping . . .
I had a nightmare of sins unforgiven.
I had a nightmare of land mines still exploding
and maimed children.
I had a nightmare of the poor left unloved,
of the homeless left unnoticed,
of the dead left ungrieved.
I had a nightmare of quarrels and rages
and wars great and small.
When I awoke, I found you still to be God,
presiding over the day and night
with serene sovereignty,
for dark and light are both alike to you.
At the break of day we submit to you
our best dreams
and our worst nightmares,
asking that your healing mercy should override threats,
that your goodness will make our
nightmares less toxic
and our dreams more real.
Thank you for visiting us with newness
that overrides what is old and deathly among us.
Come among us this day; dream us toward
health and peace,
we pray in the real name of Jesus
who exposes our fantasies.

March 30

The Good Shepherd

by Sarah Speed, A Sanctified Art

Jesus said, "Who among you wouldn't leave the 99?
Who among you wouldn't look for the one?"
Someone in the crowd probably rolled their eyes.
Someone squirmed and looked at their palms.
Someone sighed and thought to themselves,
"This man doesn't understand the business.
What fool would leave 99 to look for one?"
But maybe God was not talking about us.
Maybe God was talking about
her own reckless love.
Maybe God was talking about
her own willingness
to turn the world upside down
for me.

March 31

The Way

by Ann Weems

The way to Jerusalem
looks suspiciously like Highway 40,
and the pilgrims
look suspiciously like you and me.
I expected the road to Jerusalem
to be crowded with holy people ...
clerics and saints ...
people who have kindness wrinkled in their faces
and comfort lingering in their voices,
but this is more like rush hour ...
horns blowing, people pushing, voices cursing....
This is not what I envisioned!
O God, I've only begun and already
I feel I've lost my way.
Surely this is not the road
and surely these
are not the ones
to travel with me.
This Lenten journey calls for
holy retreat,
for reflection
and repentance.
Instead of holiness
the highway is crammed
with the cacophony
of chaos.
Is there no road back
to Jerusalem?
No quiet path
where angels tend
to weary travelers?
No sanctuary
from the noise of the world?
Just this?
Can this hectic highway
be the highway to heaven?

April 1

Untitled

by Richard Hutchison

Gathered around a still pool of water
the sheep drink their fill.
The place they have gathered is surrounded
by open fields and high cliffs.

The place they have gathered is a dangerous place.
They are not afraid.
The shepherd watches her flock.
The shepherd protects her flock.
The shepherd Calls each sheep by name.
The shepherd leads her flock.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

April 2

Here in the Psalm

by Sally Fisher

I am a sheep
and I like it
because the grass
I lie down in
feels good and the still
waters are restful and right
there if I'm thirsty
and though some valleys
are very chilly there is a long
rod that prods me so I
direct my hooves
the right way
though today
I'm trying hard
to sit at a table
because it's expected
required really
and my enemies—
it turns out I have enemies—
are watching me eat and
spill my drink
but I don't worry because
all my enemies do
is watch and I know
I'm safe if I will
just do my best
as I sit on this chair
that wobbles a bit
in the grass
on the side of a hill.

April 3

Rough Translations

by Jan Richardson

Hope nonetheless.

Hope despite.

Hope regardless.

Hope still.

Hope where we had ceased to hope.

Hope amid what threatens hope.

Hope with those who feed our hope.

Hope beyond what we had hoped.

Hope that draws us past our limits.

Hope that defies expectations.

Hope that questions what we have known.

Hope that makes a way where there is none.

Hope that takes us past our fear.

Hope that calls us into life.

Hope that holds us beyond death.

Hope that blesses those to come.

April 4

The Voice of God

by Mary Karr

Ninety percent of what's wrong with you
could be cured with a hot bath,
says God from the bowels of the subway.
But we want magic, to win
the lottery we never bought a ticket for.
(Tenderly, the monks chant, embrace
the suffering.) The voice of God does not pander,
offers no five year plan, no long-term
solution, nary an edict. It is small & fond & local.
Don't look for your initials in the geese
honking overhead or to see thru the glass even
darkly. It says the most obvious crap—
put down that gun, you need a sandwich.

April 5

How Long Does It Take to Make the Woods

by Wendell Berry

How long does it take to make the woods?

As long as it takes to make the world.

The woods is present as the world is, the presence
of all its past and of all its time to come.

It is always finished, it is always being made, the act
of its making forever greater than the act of its destruction.

It is a part of eternity for its end and beginning
belong to the end and beginning of all things,
the beginning lost in the end, the end in the beginning.

What is the way to the woods, how do you go there?

By climbing up through the six days' field,
kept in all the body's years, the body's
sorrow, weariness, and joy. By passing through
the narrow gate on the far side of that field
where the pasture grass of the body's life gives way
to the high, original standing of the trees.

By coming into the shadow, the shadow
of the grace of the strait way's ending,
the shadow of the mercy of light.

Why must the gate be narrow?

Because you cannot pass beyond it burdened.

To come into the woods you must leave behind
the six days' world, all of it, all of its plans and hopes.

You must come without weapon or tool, alone,
expecting nothing, remembering nothing,
into the ease of sight, the brotherhood of eye and leaf.

April 6

Zacchaeus was a Tax man

by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

Zacchaeus was a tax man
who one day climbed a tree,
For he was short in stature
and said he could not see.
And yet he had a problem
that mattered even more:
He didn't see the suffering
his greed had caused the poor.

O Lord, you saw Zacchaeus -
so wealthy, yet alone.
You said, "Come down — and hurry!
I'm coming to your home."
For you broke bread with sinners
and saw within each one
A person loved and treasured —
God's daughter or God's son.

It wasn't just the treetop
that helped Zacchaeus see;
Your love and welcome showed him
how different life could be.
He said that he'd start over
and work to make things fair;
He'd speak the truth, bring justice,
and find new ways to share.

O Christ, you bid us welcome
and help us all to see!
May we respond by building
a just society.
Then children won't be hungry
and all will share your bread.
Then those who now must struggle
will live in joy instead.

A hymn sung to the tune "The Church's One Foundation"

April 7

Wild Geese

by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

April 8

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?

by John Donne

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?
Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste,
I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
I dare not move my dim eyes any way,
Despair behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feebled flesh doth waste
By sin in it, which it towards hell doth weigh.
Only thou art above, and when towards thee
By thy leave I can look, I rise again;
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one hour I can myself sustain;
Thy grace may wing me to prevent his art,
And thou like adamant draw mine iron heart.

April 9

well, I'm not all that great sometimes

by Kate Bowler

If you ask me to confess something
I'll answer like a job interview:
Oh, I'm a perfectionist. I try too hard.
Who, me? I spend too much time
compensating for the faults of others.
It's exhausting.
Yes, I do try too hard, too long,
weary myself.
And this loving heart has
been broken by others
too many times to count.
But I might also add:
I want the world to cost me nothing.
I nurse grudges and nurture
my own entitlement.
I want things I shouldn't have
and desire praise I haven't earned.
I would do ugly things if I could
look good doing them.
I do not give as easily as you ask me to
and pour out my gifts with an open heart.
I don't.
And when I do, I make sure
everyone knows it.
I have done things I should regret
but loudly tell people they were
"learning experiences."
Lord, help me hold these hard truths
up to the light.
Help me admit them without falling
into a tar pit of shame.
Remind me that the light of your truth
is searing,
burning up every bit of ugliness.
Teach me that when I confess
you are healing me, changing me,
showing me the burden of a lie
and the power of the truth.
So here I am, God. Shine your light.

April 10

Thirst

by Mary Oliver

Another morning and I wake with thirst
for the goodness I do not have. I walk
out to the pond and all the way God has
given us such beautiful lessons. Oh Lord,
I was never a quick scholar but sulked
and hunched over my books past the
hour and the bell; grant me, in your
mercy, a little more time. Love for the
earth and love for you are having such a
long conversation in my heart. Who
knows what will finally happen or
where I will be sent, yet already I have
given a great many things away, expecting
to be told to pack nothing, except the
prayers which, with this thirst, I am
slowly learning.

April 11

Untitled

by Roger Hutchison

"This little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine."

But what if I can't?

What if I don't?

The light flickers dimly
threatening to go out.

There are days when the lamp will not burn

Moments when my faith is weak

Then out of the darkness

a still small voice whispers my name.

"Be ready."

"Tend to your soul."

"Make sure your lamp is filled."

"I will return."

"Let your light shine."

"Be ready."

April 12

Mindful

by Mary Oliver

Every day
I see or hear
something
that more or less
kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle
in the haystack
of light.

It was what I was born for –
to look, to listen,
to lose myself
inside this soft world –
to instruct myself
over and over
in joy,
and acclamation.

Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,
the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant –
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,
the daily presentations.

Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help
but grow wise
with such teachings
as these –
the untrimmable light
of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

April 13

for Palm Sunday

by Kate Bowler

Oh God, you are interrupting me with eternity.

And I'm not sure I'm ready.

Take hold of time and order it once again.

Let me keep pace with you.

On this Palm Sunday, time is marked as one small donkey
plods toward Jerusalem.

One with a face set like flint, feet almost grazing the ground, walks
forward

toward the eastering of all sorrow

—not in the power of horses and swift victory,
but in small, steady steps

toward the mystery

that through suffering, healing comes,

that through shame, dignity is restored,

that through the cross, powers are disarmed,
and death done away with forever.

Blessed are all those walking forward

into the great, small work they do:

in hospitals, homes, grocery stores,

classrooms, churches, and cubicles.

And blessed are we joining the crowds

waving palm branches

to shout ourselves hoarse:

"Hosanna! Save us! Save our world."

God, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Spirit, have mercy. Amen.

April 14

Holy Week

by Ann Weems

Holy is the week ...
Holy, consecrated, belonging to God...
We move from hosannas to horror
with the predictable ease
of those who know not what they do.
Our hosannas sung,
our palms waved,
let us go with passion into this week.
It is a time to curse fig trees that do not yield fruit.
It is a time to cleanse our temples of any blasphemy.
It is a time to greet Jesus as the Lord's Anointed One,
to lavishly break our alabaster
and pour perfume out for him
without counting the cost.
It is a time for preparation...
The time to give thanks and break bread is upon us.
The time to give thanks and drink of the cup is imminent.
Eat, drink, remember:
On this night of nights, each one must ask,
as we dip our bread in the wine,
"Is it I?"
And on that darkest of days, each of us must stand
beneath the tree
and watch the dying
if we are to be there
when the stone is rolled away.
The only road to Easter morning
is through the unrelenting shadows of that Friday.
Only then will the alleluias be sung;
only then will the dancing begin.

April 15

Holy Week

by Ann Weems

Where have the forty days of Lent gone?
We've had forty days to remember who Jesus is,
Forty days to find out who Jesus is,
Forty days to look and to listen to this man from Nazareth,
this man who walked into the hearts of the people,
this man who "stirred their imagination,"
this man who is still walking into the hearts of his people,
still stirring the imagination of the people,
Holy Week is upon us.
We will raise our palms in joyful recognition!
We do know him.
Surely we do know him....

April 16

Blessing for the Anointing

by Jan Richardson

Some with ointment.
Some with tears.
Me, today,
with words
gathered and treasured,
carried and poured out
for you
wherever you are.
May you welcome this
as what it is:
a needful extravagance,
an offering both lavish
and crucial
that has let go
of everything
to lay itself at your feet
and tell you
I see you.
I bless you.
And you,
where can you go
that you do not need t
his anointing,
this blessing that drenches
the one who gives,
the one who receives?

April 17

Power Like a Seed

by Sarah Speed, A Sanctified Art

In a world that wants power like a machine gun,
power like a bomber plane,
power like a gated fence to keep the hungry out,
I want power like a seed—
power that will crack me open and grow something good;
power like an open door,
an invitation that says, "Come on in;"
power that feels like a strong spine with a soft heart.
I want the power to listen, to lean in, to ask follow-up questions.
But more than anything, I want the power to bring us together, to lift
you up.
There are different kinds of power.
One will build a wall.
One will plant a garden.
We should know by now, only one will bear fruit.

April 18

for Good Friday

by Kate Bowler

To the cross, that's where love led you.
So that's where we come too,
to stand and grieve with Mary and John,
your mother and your closest friend,
overwhelmed that it should come to this:
powerlessness and utter loss.

So much hope and healing
and laughter and feasting
and miracles and promises
have come to this.

To untold suffering, and a cruel death.
It is finished.

In the darkness, a figure comes
moving cautiously,
hands reaching up to ease your body down.
And women with their spices and linens,
gently doing for you what they could,
helpless with grief as they lay you
in a tomb.

What's this? The strongest have come,
Roman soldiers enacting orders
to seal off the entrance permanently.
Blessed are we who remain here in wonder,
in the stillness, with the silence of death
so heavy upon us,
asking again, "Jesus,
is this how it goes?
is this how love wins?"

April 19

Blessing for a Broken Vessel

by Jan Richardson

Do not despair.
You hold the memory
of what it was
to be whole.
It lives deep
in your bones.
It abides
in your heart
that has been torn
and mended
a hundred times.
It persists
in your lungs
that know the mystery
of what it means
to be full,
to be empty,
to be full again.
I am not asking
you to give up your grip
on the shards you clasp
so close to you
but to wonder
what it would be like
for those jagged edges
to meet each other
in some new pattern
that you have never imagined,
that you have never dared
to dream.

April 20

In the Direction of Hope

by Sarah Speed, A Sanctified Art

I am on my way.
Wait for me in the garden;
I will be there soon.
I'm not the fastest runner,
Lord knows that,
but these legs are moving.
I suppose I could blame my weary spirit for the slow speed.
I could blame the grief I've shoved into my pockets and
laid around my neck.
I could blame my own hesitation to hope,
a hesitation that clings like mud.
But I don't know that Jesus cares about my speed.
So tell God when you see them—
I am on my way.
Wait for me in the garden.
I will be there soon.

April 21

Untitled

by Roger Hutchison

The journey has brought you
Here.
To this place.
The tomb
His body waits.
We are his body now.
He calls us to go.
He calls us to seek and serve.
He calls us to love.
He calls us to be his light in the world.
At times
We feel alone.
At times
The challenge is too much.
But we keep walking.
We keep moving.
We are not alone.
We will never be alone.



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