

# LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



## INTRODUCTION

The nature of these devotions are writings by three colleagues and friends, who strive to be followers of Jesus in ways that are unique, individually, but who are connected to one another by a shared story of study and friendship. We decided on doing our devotionals independent of one another, letting the Spirit guide us as led. Doing this may seem strange but we see ourselves, as a trio, who over the years have thought together and produced numerous videos on the narrative lectionary. We borrowed from the Jazz world, a style of trust and working together, allowing each to highlight their gifts within the structure and the call of the Lenten season. We entitled these devotions, “Lenten Improvisations” to say a little about what we are trying to accomplish in doing a devotional this way. Improvisation, as defined by the Jazz world, is the “spontaneous composition of melodies in the form and harmony of the song”. Each member of the trio takes the melody and breathes new life into it, using their instrument in ways that are expansive and unique to the instrument. Jenn, Steve and I are the instruments that God is using in this time and space to breathe new life into our Lenten journeys. We hope that you may experience the joy and understanding that comes from listening to a Jazz trio that has honed its life skills when reading these devotions.

Jennifer Long, Steve Langford, Mike Trautman

Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2021

No matter how you try to avoid it, Lent punches you in the face and tells you the truth: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19)

Hmmnn, I think to myself, I am much more than dust. I am part of a species that is top of the food chain and is the apex creature in all the world. True, as that may be, when push comes to shove, one day all I shall be is dust, scattered to the four winds of the world, a speck in the sands of time. Lent brings us down and it hurts, no, wait, it is frightening. Yet, it also whispers of new ways of rising up and being selves, that make all of it, worth living in the first place.

Thursday

February 18, 2021

“You do you.” It’s a phrase I hear from my kids. Usually accompanied by a sideways glance or an eye roll. Usually preceded by the offering of unwelcome or unappealing idea... or maybe even some unsolicited advice. Not that I’d ever give any, of course. But when I move beyond just my automatic

response to this automatic response... it's not a bad jumping off place for thinking. What does it actually mean 'you do you'... or more importantly, what does it mean for 'me' to do 'me'? Then instead of a pushing aside of something 'un'... unwanted, unappealing, unwelcome (feel free to add in other 'un's here) it's an opportunity for me to reflect... what did I offer that provoked the response? Did I offer that out of fear? Did I offer it out of hope? Did I offer it out of curiosity? What do I learn about myself, the other and the relationship as I explore this... suddenly, all the 'un's take a back seat, and opportunity takes their place. If I'm going to seize that opportunity... I might just need to take the log out of my own eye first. (Matthew 7:3)

Friday

February 19, 2021

Pogo is credited with saying, “We have met the enemy and he is us!” How often am I my own worst enemy?! During this Lenten season, what might the Spirit show me about how to function in a healthier, less self-destructive way?

Scripture & Prayer: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

Weekly Summary

Ash Wednesday

No matter how you try to avoid it, Lent punches you in the face and tells you the truth.

Thursday

What does it actually mean ‘you do you’... or more importantly, what does it mean for ‘me’ to do ‘me’?

Friday

Pogo is credited with saying, “We have met the enemy and he is us!” How often am I my own worst enemy?

Monday

February 22, 2021

“To be or not to be, that is the question:” I prefer to be thank you very much! Yet that kind of misses Hamlet’s point, and that is what kind of being will I be. Ah, that is indeed the question, one that Lent does not shy away from asking, all those who volunteer to walk the walk with Jesus. Lent dares say to you, forget your preoccupation with what others do and pay attention to who you are, this moment and the next. What say you?

Scripture:

Tuesday

February 23, 2021

Still thinking about the early verses of Matthew 7—a true riff as they just kept repeating in my head—and offering to take the log out of my own eye *first* (‘you do you’... or rather, me doing me). I can’t offer to take the log out of my own eye *first* if I’m by myself; there’s no one to go second. I can ‘do me,’ but I never do ‘me’ alone. I don’t exist in a vacuum; I never have... I didn’t drop from the sky fully formed, but grew into who I am in a particular context. In conversation with the family where I raised, with the family I was a part of creating, and even with my ancestors from long ago. Conversations that have taught me... when I’m able to stand on my principles and when I’d rather not to keep the peace; conversations have brought me joy and laughter and, if I’m honest, conversations that

leave me so anxious I go out of my way to avoid them. And even the conversations I avoid... I'm not having with someone else. The only way to be a self, to become myself, is in relationship to others.

Wednesday

February 24, 2021

My self-sabotaging, self-destructive ways lie outside my awareness – in the realm of the unconscious. That's the bad news! How can I address what I cannot see? The good news is the Spirit works to transform the heart.

Transformation is the Spirit's work. My role is to be open and responsive to the Spirit's work. Such is the work of the Lenten season.

Scripture: “For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within” (Mark 7:22-23a).

Prayer: Help me, Spirit of God, to be open to what you are doing within me.

Thursday

February 25, 2021

What is my true self? Who am I after all is said and done? Do I have a true self? I mean a self that can stand the tests of time. The universe is over 13.8 billion years old, and if all the stars align perhaps, I will reach 100. 13800000000 vs 100, talk about perspective. It makes one feel a little less awesome, however in a “Lenten twist” it also offers comfort, knowing I am loved by the One who alone has been present for all those zeros. I am just a dust speck in the vastness of an expanding universe, but I am here to do my part in being the best me that I can.

Friday

February 26, 2021

“Take on me...” cue familiar sounds of Norwegian 80s band, ‘A-ha’ here. Lent is thought to be a time to give something up. For me, that’s been a mixed bag of success and failure, scales tipping, more often than not, toward failure. I’ll give up dessert for Lent... but then a birthday or holiday (regularly St. Patrick’s day) falls during the season. I’ll give up television... inevitably March Madness gets in the way. I’ll give up going out to eat for Lent... which doesn’t really feel like giving up anything since COVID-19 has made that my norm. But what if instead of giving something UP, I take something ON? Lent is also a time of



reflection and discernment, so a great time to think on what really matters to me... and how is that 'what really matters' shaping my life and my work? Guiding me in what I do or don't do? What can I 'take on' that helps me live out of my best self? Wonder what I'll take on...

## Summary for the week of February 22-26 2021

Monday, February 22

What kind of being will I be? Ah, that is indeed the question, one that Lent does not shy away from asking.

Tuesday, February 23

The only way to be a self, to become myself, is in relationship to others.

Wednesday, February 24

Transformation is the Spirit's work. My role is to be open and responsive to the Spirit's work. Such is the work of the Lenten season.

Thursday, February 25

Who am I after all is said and done? I am loved by the One who alone has been present for all those zeros.

Friday, February 26

Lent is thought to be a time of giving up something. What if instead of giving something UP, I take something ON?

Monday

March 1

The story of the Garden (Genesis 3) reflects our inclination to blame others as a way to avoid looking at ourselves. We judge and find fault in others, so we don't have to see what is lacking in us. This inclination is a part of our human condition. While this common pattern is designed to hide what we don't want to see about ourselves, it can also be a source of insight. It can be a window through which we glimpse what is in our hearts. What I judge and condemn in others tells me something about myself. Scripture: "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye" (Matthew 7:3-5). Prayer: Give me the courage and strength, O God, to see what I don't want to see in myself

Tuesday

March 2

Paul Simon's Graceland, is one of my favorite songs. Beside the catchy tune, the words touch my spirit and invite me to think about the human condition, which after all is my condition.

"There is a girl in New York City

who call herself the human trampoline

And sometimes when I'm falling, flying

Or tumbling in turmoil I say

'Whoa, so this is what she means'

She means we're bouncing into Graceland'

I so get that. Yep, life is a messy journey but it is headed to Graceland with all the "falling, flying and tumbling in turmoil" that goes with it. Thank you, God, that we all are on our way to Graceland!

Wednesday

March 3

Ok... I've riffed on taking something on, but I also find merit in giving something up... even if I have regularly failed at it. I understand the discipline of giving something up for Lent as intended to both emulate and remind me of Jesus sacrifice when went out into the wilderness to begin his ministry. I wonder if it is also an opportunity to create space... to give something up and use that as a door (or a window) to bring me closer to God. What might I give up? How might that effect my relationship with God?

Thursday

March 4

When I was growing up, teachers always used red pencils to grade my papers, marking the mistakes and circling my grade in red. I dreaded the assignments that bled red. Even when I did well on an assignment, my eyes were always drawn to the red markings, indicating what I got wrong. No matter how many questions I answered correctly, I only focused on the ones I got wrong.

It seems most of us are adept at grading ourselves. It's as though we carry a red pencil around so we can mark how we get it wrong. Our focus on our failings keeps us stuck ... in guilt and shame and self-reproach. When the pain of our failure becomes too great, we anesthetize it by focusing on how others fail to measure up.

Scripture: The LORD “does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:10-11).

Prayer: Teach me, O LORD, to live more out of your grace and forgiveness and less out of my critical, red-pen spirit.

Friday

March 5

“Blessed are the poor” or is it, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit”. The first version comes from Luke’s Gospel while the second is from Matthew’s. Let me think, which one was Jesus’ original words? “Blessed are the poor in Spirit” because I not in any way poor and at least for Lent, I can say that I am poor in spirit. Does it

matter? It only matters. when we get all up in arms, because deep down we wonder if God's love is sufficient enough to bless us.; even those of us who are not poor and do not care to be poor. So that leaves me with this question; are we so fragile in our faith , that we have to hoard all of God love and blessings for ourselves?

## Summary

March 1-5

This week's devotional thoughts included:

- insight from the garden
- life's messy journey
- giving something up
- red-pen measuring up
- God's love sufficient enough