



FORTY DAYS WITH GROUNDED: A DEVOTIONAL
(For Lent or Any Season of Seeking Deeper Spiritual Roots)

Day 1
Ash Wednesday (Lenten Cycle)

“We are animated dirt. Soil and life joined. From living ground we were made; to living ground we will return.”

(Grounded, p. 42)

SCRIPTURE:

For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.
(Genesis 3:19)

REFLECTION:

What does it really mean that we are made from dust? I find it shockingly beautiful—the idea that my life is drawn from the earth. Of course, that dust is made from exploding stars and from all the life that ever existed. It carries the memories of billions of years, of immense wisdom, of lives lived long ago. We are connected so deeply with all that has gone before. One day, I shall return to that

dust—and my being will join with the dust. Once, I considered that a sad thought. Now, I am amazed by it.

PRAYER:

God, with profound gratitude, I remember that you created humankind from the dirt, by breathing on the clay and giving life. May this Lent be one of thankful remembrance of connection with the earth and your call to care for all creation.

Day 2

“Where is God? . . . The grounded God is a God in relationship with space and time as the love that connects and creates all things, known in and with the world. . . . God is not above or beyond, but integral to the whole of creation, entwined with the sacred ecology of the universe.”

(Grounded, pp. 10, 25)

SCRIPTURE:

O that I knew where I might find God,
that I might come even to his dwelling!
(Job 23:3)

REFLECTION:

Every time I have experienced new depth or new wisdom in my spiritual life, the path toward the new awareness begins with a sense of loss of God’s presence. God seems absent, unavailable in the usual places, elusive. I am lost. I have learned to trust the question “Where is God?” as a marker along the way. No fear. Only a sign to pay attention to the ways in which the spirit is speaking.



PRAYER:

God, the Beloved, who is with and within, may questions of your absence direct us toward the reality of your indwelling of all things.

Day 3

“Land may be viewed through the eyes of spiritual awareness, as part of a divine ecosystem. . . . When we care for the earth, we are practicing obedience and holiness; disregarding the ground is sinful and evil.”

(*Grounded*, p. 43)

SCRIPTURE:

Turn from evil, and do good,
and dwell in the land for ever.
For the Lord loves justice;
he does not forsake his faithful ones.
(Psalms 37:28–29)

REFLECTION:

Until recently, I never associated holiness with the land. Yet, God’s concern for the land, for the justice of the garden, is one of the dominant themes of the Bible. It pains me to think of how much I have neglected the ground, sinned against the soil. I want to do better.

PRAYER:

God, the Ground of all that is, forgive me for my careless disregard for the land. Today, let me see the earth with new spiritual awareness, as you see your beautiful creation. And may that new seeing lead to new action on my part to treat the earth as holy ground.



Day 4

“By tending the soil, we imitate the creative process in Genesis. We can ‘breathe’ new life into the ground. This reconnects us with both soil and life, opening us up to new ways of experiencing God with us in the world.”

(Grounded, pp. 49–50)

SCRIPTURE:

For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the caverns of the earth,
and the heights of the hills are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands have molded the dry land.

(Psalms 95:3–5)

REFLECTION:

How can I breathe new life into damaged soil? How to tend the earth? I’m not a farmer. But I can pay attention to where my food comes from, the needs of farmers and those who grow my family’s food. I can also support policies for wise land use, whether related to food issues or concerns of waste disposal, recycling, and caring for local and national parks. We share a responsibility for the land, to ensure its health and well-being now and on behalf of the future.

PRAYER:

“We remember with shame that in the past,
we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty,
so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to Thee



in song has been a groan of travail.
May we realize that all things live, not for us alone,
but for themselves and for Thee.”
(Basil of Caesarea, ca. 360)

Day 5

“We are here, on this planet, walking around on the same ground, depending on the soil for life. And God is with us. Earth is not an illusion, a tragic dream, or a spiritual metaphor. Earth is definitely for real.”

(*Grounded*, p. 63)

SCRIPTURE:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1)

REFLECTION:

My mother used to say, “Some Christians are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.” Mom was right.

PRAYER:

“Blessed are you, O God,
Creator of the universe,
who have made all things good
and given the earth for us to cultivate.
Grant that we may always use created things gratefully
and share your gift with those in need.”

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Day 6

“Had I ever believed that God was in a far-off place called heaven? Was I ever spiritually satisfied worshipping God inside a building with four walls and no connection to the world outside? Faith has turned me increasingly toward the soil, not away from it. To this garden, to the earth. And God is here.”

(*Grounded*, pp. 63–64)

SCRIPTURE:

When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees.

(Genesis 3:8)

REFLECTION:

I wish our ancestors were not afraid of God in the garden. Temptation led to moral failure, moral failure to shame, and shame to avoiding the sacred presence. Our shame over our failings separates us from love. I have sometimes “hidden” inside of buildings and rituals to protect me from an encounter with the sacred in the world. “Safe” religion is a form of taking cover in the trees, and it is odd that we can use even church to avoid being face-to-face with the Holy One. We reenact ancient stories in our own lives.

PRAYER:

Let me not be afraid of encountering holiness in the garden, even when I feel temptation and shame. For love overcomes our failures and mistakes.



Day 7

In his Gospel, “John uses many metaphors for God—
Word, light, vine, door, bread, shepherd, love . . .
Perhaps God is water as well as spirit. It is easy to
imagine John’s Jesus saying, ‘We enter into the sacred
presence through water and wind.’”

(Grounded, p. 70)

SCRIPTURE:

Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God
without being born of water and Spirit.

(John 3:5)

REFLECTION:

What does it mean to be wet with sacredness, to be watered with
love?

PRAYER:

“As a deer longs for living streams, as a weary traveler longs for the
waters of life, so our souls long for you, O God. Refresh us, cleanse
us, heal us with your living water. Pour out your Spirit upon us so
our lives might overflow with your love. Pour out your Spirit upon
all creation so that justice might roll down like waters and righ-
teousness like a mighty stream. Amen.”

(Used by permission, Rev. Talitha Arnold, United Church of Santa
Fe, NM)



Day 8

“As we pay attention to rivers and seas, we might also discover God’s fluid presence with the water.”

(Grounded, p. 71)

SCRIPTURE:

Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea.
(Ecclesiastes 1:7)

REFLECTION:

Walk today near water, if you can. If you can’t walk near water, remember the sea, a lake, a river that you love. What did you see? What did you hear? Did you have a keener sense of God? God is “green,” as the Great Farmer of the earth, but is God also “blue,” the watery presence of the Deep?

PRAYER:

God, as the rivers flow over the earth in a never-ceasing rhythm, may I know that your love flows in my life as well, always returning to water my soul.

Day 9

“Ancient biblical tradition suggests that waters—wells, springs, oases—are also places of renewal, hospitality, and spiritual vision, where human beings see God and receive God’s blessing.”

(Grounded, p. 73)



SCRIPTURE:

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

(Isaiah 12:3)

REFLECTION:

We had a decorative well in the side yard of my childhood home. My brother, sister, and I loved playing on it, throwing things into the well. We were fascinated by it. Then, when we moved to the country, we had well water in our house. I remember how cold, fresh, and pure the water tasted. Such memories, I think, make me feel angry and sad when I hear about those who do not have good water—or situations like Flint, Michigan, where water is used as a political tool. All human beings should be able to play at water's edge, to drink good water, and find renewal and health there. A good well is a human right.

PRAYER:

Open my eyes, O God, to see the wells of your presence around me in the world today. And give me the passion to provide wells and water for all.

Day 10

“[Jesus] gives water, and he is water.”

(Grounded, p. 76)

SCRIPTURE:

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

(John 4:10)



REFLECTION:

Growing up in church, I often heard the story of Jacob's Ladder. And I often heard the story of John 4, the woman at the well. But I didn't know that the well was called Jacob's Well (I missed that day in Sunday School?). Jacob's Ladder depicts salvation as "up and down," as if we climb to heaven. But this encounter at Jacob's Well depicts salvation as drinking deeply, of going down into the waters. The contrast is compelling. Come to the Well. Drink.

PRAYER:

"O Lord my God, may Thy Holy Gift and Thy Holy Water be unto forgiveness of my sins, unto enlightenment of my mind, unto strengthening of my spiritual and bodily powers, unto health of my soul and body, unto vanquishing of my passions and weaknesses, by Thy boundless merciful kindness. Amen."

(From the Russian Orthodox tradition)

Day 11

"How often times in my own life are like what happens in the riparian zone: the ground under my feet softens, my steps turn tentative, and I become unsure of where or how to move ahead. This is the geography of trust and transformation, where the safe shore dissolves and we feel disoriented as we consider what we should do next."

(*Grounded*, p. 90)

SCRIPTURE:

You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;



the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.

(Psalms 65:9)

REFLECTION:

The riparian zone is the riverbank, that which is neither solid ground nor fully water. It appears mucky, often ugly and full of trash. But it is one of the most important physical spaces on earth; it actually cleans the river, acting as a filter for water; controls floods; and teems with life. Without healthy riparian zones, the planet will die. There is a similar spiritual geography—the liminal place. It is the place between what was and what will be, between certainty and loss. Experiencing the riparian zone and the liminal place seems the same to me, and the river is a sort of embodied sacrament of the soul's journey.

PRAYER:

Beloved, give me courage to explore the riparian zone of my soul.
May I learn to trust and know this place as a geography of grace.

Day 12

“The Bible begins with the deep, when God's spirit
sweeps over the waters. . . . For Christians, the Bible
also ends with water.”

(*Grounded*, p. 95)

SCRIPTURE:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, following from the throne of God and of the Lamb



through the middle of the street of the city. . . . Let everyone who is thirsty come.”

(Revelation 22:1–2, 17)

REFLECTION:

Water is a place of healing, flowing, cleansing, healing, and transformation. But it is also a place of play, of celebration. I imagine the River of God with everyone splashing at its edge, diving deep in its waters, laughing and playing together. The book of Revelation ends with a beautiful, earthly experience of joy!

PRAYER:

You who are Living Water, may we play in you! May we be free enough to dive into the depths of the river, never fearing the splash of grace!

Day 13

“The sky is beyond our comprehension. Where does it begin or end? How large is it? . . . The sky touches the earth, yet its outer edges are infinitely far from us. It is where we always are, what we always breathe. . . . The sky is the most intimate inner space and the most incomprehensible outer reaches of the universe.”

(Grounded, p. 100)

SCRIPTURE:

Our God is in the heavens;
He does whatever he pleases . . .



The heavens are the LORD'S heavens,
But the Earth he has given to human beings.
(Psalms 115:3, 16)

REFLECTION:

The sky seems so far away—and many religions speak of a God (or gods) who makes a home in the heavens. Yet, the sky is often most interesting when it feels close. The fog that surrounds us, low clouds we can almost touch, and beautiful light we experience at sunrise and sunset. In the Scriptures, God is often depicted as the cloud that hovers all around, the light that enlightens our souls. The sky is a profound image for God's location. And it is not far off at all.

PRAYER:

May I see how I am surrounded by you today, God.

Day 14

“To say that God is in the sky is *not* to imply that God lives at a certain address above the earth. Instead, it is an invitation to consider God's presence that both reaches to the stars and wafts through our lives as a spiritual breeze.”

(Grounded, p. 103)

SCRIPTURE:

The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit.
(John 3:8)



REFLECTION:

The wind is the most mysterious of all the classical elements, known only by its effects. Is that how God's Spirit works, too? We cannot see the Spirit. But we can see the Spirit's effects in our lives. Invisible. Yet visible through our compassion, our character, and our courage.

PRAYER:

“Let heaven's winds stir the soil of our soul
and fresh awakenings rise within us.
May the mighty angels of light
glisten in all things this day.
May they summon us to reverence,
may they call us to life.”

(From John Philip Newell's *Praying with the Earth*)

Day 15

“The big bang's simplest insight, and the one with the most profound implication for understanding God and contemporary spirituality, is straightforward: everything that exists was created at the same time; thus all things are connected by virtue of being made of the same matter.”

(*Grounded*, p. 107)

SCRIPTURE:

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one



and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.
(Isaiah 40:26)

REFLECTION:

I love these words from theologian Elizabeth Johnson: “Out of the big bang, the stars; out of the stardust, Earth; out of the matter of the Earth, life. Out of the life and death of single-celled creatures, an advancing tide: trilobites, fish, amphibians, insects, flowers, birds, reptiles, and mammals, among whom emerged human beings. . . . Everything is connected with everything else.”

Hold that close to your heart today: “Everything is connected with everything else.”

PRAYER:

God, open my eyes to see connections that I have never seen before. May I feel the holy threads that weave through the world and the entire cosmos.

Day 16

“The Abrahamic religions refer to God as Spirit, the holy wind animating life. . . . This is the mysterious presence, unseen but active, manifested across the world, giving life to all goodness and beauty. Richer than a metaphor, God’s spirit is the air, the wind.”

(*Grounded*, p. 110)



SCRIPTURE:

The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

(Genesis 1:2)

O LORD, you are the God who gives breath to all creatures.

(Numbers 27:16a)

REFLECTION:

I remember when, in seminary, I first learned that the Hebrew word *ruach* meant “wind, breath, and spirit,” and that it is used almost 400 times in the Old Testament. Wind, breath, spirit. So beautiful. So poetic. We breathe the spirit. *Ruach* is life.

PRAYER:

Breathe on me, breath of God. And may I breathe in your spirit of life. Amen.

Day 17

“Heaven is both a location in the larger cosmos and a spiritual geography that represents divine attributes and intention. . . . In the New Testament, heaven most often appears as the ‘kingdom of heaven,’ God’s political and social vision for humanity.”

(*Grounded*, p. 119)

SCRIPTURE:

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

(Matthew 6:10)



REFLECTION:

That “heaven” is a political and social vision might be shocking to some, for many people still think of “heaven” as a perfect place you go after you die. Jesus, however, taught that heaven was an immediately accessible reality, a way of life based in God’s compassion and justice. To him, heaven was here and now, not some distant place in the future. We don’t go to heaven. Heaven has come to us. And we are called to live its radical love in the world.

PRAYER:

“Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother,
Holy and blessed is your true name.
We pray for your reign of peace to come,
We pray that your good will be done,
Let heaven and earth become one.
Give us this day the bread we need,
Give it to those who have none.
Let forgiveness flow like a river between us,
From each one to each one.
Lead us to holy innocence
Beyond the evil of our days—
Come swiftly Mother, Father, come.
For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy:
Forever your name is All in One.”
(“The Lord’s Prayer,” version by Parker Palmer)



Day 18

“The sky begins at our feet. Thus, we actually live in the heavens now, in the space in which earth and sky meet. God’s ‘heavenly’ presence is the air we breathe.”

(*Grounded*, p. 120)

SCRIPTURE:

The spirit of God has made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.
(Job 33:4)

REFLECTION:

There’s a famous quote by Billy Graham: “My home is in Heaven. I’m just traveling through this world.” I’ve always worried about it. I much prefer this quote from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: “Earth . . . is humanity’s home, and humans are never so much at home as when God dwells with them.”

It matters to the health and well-being of our souls—and the world—that we understand that we live in “heaven” now, that God is with us.

PRAYER:

Fill me with a dancing joy in the realization that I am walking about in heaven now—that the sky, the divine dwelling place, begins at my feet! You are here, O God, surrounding me, enlivening me! How wonderful!



Day 19

“Earth, water, sky, and fire. There is God. A spiritual revolution and ancient awareness.”

(Grounded, p. 126)

SCRIPTURE:

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.
You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.

(Psalms 104:1–5)

REFLECTION:

I don't believe that earth, water, sky, and fire are the literal building blocks of the universe in the way our ancestors did. But I do believe that earth, water, sky, and fire are the building blocks of the universe's spiritual architecture—being aware of this sacred structure honors creation and opens our eyes to find God with us. “God with us” was the core of Jesus' revolution, and I sense that it is the core of the spiritual revolution of our own time.



PRAYER:

May I feel the heartbeat of the earth with my feet on the ground; may I be cleansed by life-giving water; may I bend in the wind of the spirit; may I be aflame with the love that animates the universe.

Day 20

“Roots, home, neighborhood, and community—these are the geographies of our lives, the places where God dwells.”

(Grounded, p. 131)

SCRIPTURE:

How lovely are your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts!
(Psalms 84:1)

REFLECTION:

My daughter took a course entitled “Human Geography” that linked social sciences to landscapes and explored the interrelationship between human community and geography. It fascinated me and made me consider spirituality and landscapes, how human community, our sense of the divine, and geography are of a piece. Indeed, human community and nature are like a mobius strip. For me, that mobius strip is a symbol of grace, of the divine presence that is the spiritual geography of our lives.

PRAYER:

God, you who are infinitely present in creation and in community, help us to see the spiritual geography of mercy and compassion that holds nature and neighbor as we live our daily lives.



Day 21

“I did not want to leave. I wanted to stay forever, embraced by the spare holiness. I sensed a connection with the place, the strange sensation of once having been there, even though I had never even entered a Quaker meetinghouse before . . . I [felt] like [I was] home.”

(Grounded, p. 135)

SCRIPTURE:

Then the Lord said to him, “Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

(Acts 7:33, after Exodus 3:5)

REFLECTION:

Have you ever been somewhere that made you feel like you were home? A place that gave you a powerful sense of connection, of mysterious presence, of knowing yourself more deeply? Some scientists now suggest that our genes carry patterns of memory that we inherit from our ancestors, and these memories actually connect us with people and experiences from long ago. We do “remember” places we have never been. In this way, the past is always with us. Perhaps some places jog deep and ancient memory, alerting us to a different reality than the one of our immediate experience. Is this one of the ways we “remember” God? Are there places that serve as the holy ground of our lives?

PRAYER:

Give me a deeper sense of wonder, God, that even my genes carry memory of my ancestors—and an even more ancient memory—the spiritual memory of you as Creator. Attune me to the places where I stumble into grace, may I be able to discern holy ground.



Day 22

“If we do not know where we came from or where we are in a story, it is difficult to imagine that we can grasp the meaning and purpose of our own lives.”

(Grounded, p. 142)

SCRIPTURE:

Tell your children about it in the years to come, and let your children tell their children. Pass the story down from generation to generation.

(Joel 1:3)

REFLECTION:

What kind of stories did you hear from your parents, your grandparents? Were they stories of hope and grace, compassion and justice? Or were they negative stories? How do those stories still shape your identity? Do you embrace those stories with joy, or do you need to revise and rewrite the stories passed down to you? What kind of stories are you passing on to your own children?

PRAYER:

“For long years I have kept this beauty within me,
It has been my life.
It is sacred.
I give it now that coming generations may know the truth
About my people.
I give it as the dew falls.
I give it as sacred pollen,
That there may increase a better understanding among all people.
My days have been long.



Whoever reads and loves and learns from these stories
Shall profit by them,
And their days shall be lengthened.
I give these in the spirit of generosity
Asking that no harm will come from the Powers
Who have given these stories to us.
May no harm come from them.
May they be accepted as an offering,
As the pollen,
As the dew.”
(Navajo Storyteller’s Prayer)

Day 23

“Genealogy is one of the most significant, perhaps even universal, aspects of religion. Since the dawn of time, human beings have believed that spiritual insight, power, and piety somehow passes down through generations.”

(*Grounded*, pp. 143–144)

SCRIPTURE:

But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.
(Exodus 20:6)

REFLECTION:

When I first heard this verse as a teenager, I knew that I wanted to bless my descendants for a thousand generations. I dreamed of living in such a way that love would reverberate from my life through the lives of those who follow me. And I also knew that someone



somewhere in my family's past had loved God and passed that grace-filled largess to me. Blessing is a gift, received and handed on.

PRAYER:

Do not let me hoard love! Instead, let me imagine love as a legacy for generations to come. May those I never know be blessed by the life I live now.

Day 24

“Creation is not bound by a divine hierarchical order but is, instead, a circle or dance or tapestry, where God, humanity, and nature participate together in community. . . . [This is] the web of life . . . a spiritual ecology.”

(Grounded, pp. 153, 155)

SCRIPTURE:

I want you woven into a tapestry of love, in touch with everything there is to know of God. Then you will have minds confident and at rest, focused on Christ, God's great mystery. All the richest treasures of wisdom and knowledge are embedded in that mystery and nowhere else.

(Colossians 2:2–3, The Message)

REFLECTION:

The order of the universe is not a top-down structure. Rather, the order of the universe is a kind of mutuality, creativity, and interdependence of life. Nothing is “above” or “below,” everything is connected with the gossamer threads of grace. How humbling. How beautiful.



PRAYER:

Teach me to live with a profound awareness of the tapestry of love,
the web of grace.

Day 25

“By the time I was eighteen, my family had lived in seven different houses in two states. . . . By the time I was thirty, I lived in seven more houses and four additional states. . . . Moving from place to place was hard. But making a home was a spiritual work of inhabiting new places well and knowing how to open the door to strangers—something not easy to achieve, but necessary to fill the ache that dwells in human hearts to belong.”

(Grounded, p.165)

SCRIPTURE:

My people will live in a peaceful habitation, and in secure dwellings and in undisturbed resting places.

(Isaiah 32:18)

REFLECTION:

There is a beautiful tension in Scripture between pilgrimage and dwelling. We are a pilgrim people; the Bible calls us “strangers,” “aliens,” and “wayfarers.” Yet one of the Bible’s greatest promises is that everyone will find a home in God. That dwelling, the habitation of the holy, is the source of peace, rest, and wholeness. About thirty years ago, two Christian theologians referred to this tension by saying that God’s people are “resident aliens,” trying to enfold the movement of pilgrimage with the promise of home. To live into this paradox is to understand and experience the spiritual



transformation of being here—on this earth, where God dwells with us, our home.

PRAYER:

May my life today be a harmony of movement and rest, of going out and coming home. And in both, God, let me be aware of you as the spirit of wandering and the spirit of dwelling. You are my home.

Day 26

“Throughout Jewish history, marriage has been understood as sacred, and the [homes we make are] expected to be governed by harmony. This ideal is expressed in the Hebrew term *shalom bayit*, meaning ‘peace in the home.’ *Shalom bayit* signifies completeness or wholeness achieved through nurture, respect, and *chesed* (‘loving kindness’). Thus, the home is the place of most intimate fulfillment . . . a sanctuary of God’s presence.”

(*Grounded*, pp.177–178)

SCRIPTURE:

By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established;
And by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and
pleasant riches.

(Proverbs 24:3–4)

REFLECTION:

Houses are just buildings. And horrible things may happen inside of them. A spiritual vision of “home” takes work, to make an environment of kindness and mercy with others (or if one is single, making



a home that enriches this for oneself) is not easy. But it is the central task of “homemaking,” which has less to do with laundry and dishes than it does with wisdom and the intentional practice of love.

PRAYER:

“Bless this house and those within
Bless our giving and receiving
Bless our words and conversation
Bless our hands and recreation
Bless our sowing and our growing
Bless our coming and our going
Bless all who enter and depart
Bless this house, your peace impart”

(Prayer by Helen Mary, 1927, published on Faith & Worship, available online: http://www.faithandworship.com/blessings_for_a_house.html)

Day 27

“A door is the place of coming and going, of safety and protection, and of welcome. . . . Doors keep out danger, but also usher guests and strangers into the sanctuary that is home. The doorway serves as a moral stage for the practice of hospitality, an architectural reminder of how we receive others into the inner places of our lives.”

(Grounded, pp. 181–182)

SCRIPTURE:

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

(Hebrews 13:2)



REFLECTION:

The only thing that can save us from suspicion, division, and nativism is the practice of hospitality—the act of welcoming the stranger into our lives, communities, and homes. Hospitality is the single most radical and transformative thing we can do in the world today. And it is a practice at the heart of God.

PRAYER:

Give me courage, God, to offer hospitality to anyone who wanders through my life today—to give a kind word, a smile, a hand of help, or a moment of blessing to those in need of welcome.

Day 28

“The word ‘dwell’ is related to an Old English word for ‘heresy’ or ‘madness.’ Perhaps it is a sort of insanity to believe that God dwells with us. If so, the madness is a long-lingering hope of the human race, the dream to dwell.”

(Grounded, p. 191)

SCRIPTURE:

My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

(Ezekiel 37:27)

REFLECTION:

I love the word “dwell.” As a verb, it means to reside, to live in a particular condition, or to linger. And I love that it is related to the Old English word for “heresy,” to “turn aside,” “hinder,” or “way-lay.” This beautiful irony—of dwelling and heresy—makes me



laugh. And it makes me happy to embrace the idea that God might actually hinder us, or turn us aside, from all that we think is important, urgent, or right that we might dwell more deeply in the Spirit.

PRAYER:

“Send out your light; let it bring me to your dwelling.
Send out your light; let it bring me to your dwelling.
Send out your light; let it bring me to your dwelling.”

(Prayer based on Psalms 43:3, after a suggestion by John Philip Newell)

Day 29

“Quietly, painfully, unexpectedly, we learned that when one of us is lost, we all are. We are our sisters’ keepers.”

(Grounded, p.195)

SCRIPTURE:

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.
(I Thessalonians 5:15)

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

(Philippians 2:4)

REFLECTION:

If you have ever lived in a community struck by sudden tragedy, you have probably experienced how quickly people discover how much they share with their neighbors. The power of a storm, an



extended period of being without electricity or some other important service, being the victims of a crime—these terrible events draw us together and often bring out the best in us. People rise to the occasion, helping one another grieve and recover, and find that empathy, sympathy, and compassion are among our greatest human assets. We are truly each other's keepers. And it would be wonderful to remember that in times of plenty as well as times of challenge.

PRAYER:

“O Lord, by your holy prophets you taught your ancient people to seek the welfare of the cities in which they lived. We commend our neighborhood to your care, that it might be kept free from social strife and decay. Give us strength of purpose and concern for others, that we may create here a community of justice and peace where your will may be done.”

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Day 30

“All of the world's religions make neighbors the central concern of spirituality and ethics. Love of God and neighbor are absolutely intertwined. . . . If we understand that neighborly relations are woven into divine love, then we can grasp that God is . . . a near-dwelling God. We know God through our neighbors.”

(*Grounded*, p. 197)

SCRIPTURE:

Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and



great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

(Matthew 22:37–40)

REFLECTION:

In many ways, it is easy to agree that we should love our neighbors. The harder—and more controversial—question comes next: “But who is my neighbor?” Is it the person who annoys me? The one who has broken the peace of a neighborhood? Someone from a different culture, a different religion? A person who might frighten or threaten me? Indeed, neighbors are not necessarily likable nor like us. The call to neighborliness is not a call to dwell safely in gated communities, but instead it is a call to go over fences and boundaries and treat other human beings with dignity.

PRAYER:

Forgive me for not loving my neighbor as myself and help me to practice neighborly compassion when it is most difficult. May I remember that love for others is intimately bound with divine love.

Day 31

“Proximity is not only what makes a neighborhood. Simply living next to others is not enough. The spirit of neighborhood means practicing the Golden Rule, when near dwellers treat others the way they hope to be treated. When we love our neighbors as ourselves, we build sacred connections between the spaces we inhabit.”

(*Grounded*, p. 201)



SCRIPTURE:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

(Leviticus 19:18)

REFLECTION:

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Walk in the other person's shoes. Consider how others feel before speaking. Remember that every person is like an angel in disguise. Love is hard work. And that work begins by seeing our neighbors as fully human. We all long for love and respect and hope that our dreams will come to pass. Seeing that in our neighbor's eyes opens us to our common humanity. Being tender and kind can change everything. We too often forget this. But it is perhaps the most important thing we can do in our lives.

PRAYER:

Make my hands strong for the work of love, and my heart open to receive others as I long to be received. Give me the courage to build the sort of neighborhood that I want to live in, claiming the agency of compassion to heal and restore anything that may be amiss or broken. Amen.



Day 32

“True neighborliness can be described as [mutual responsibility], acting toward one another with respect and understanding.”

(*Grounded*, p. 222)

SCRIPTURE:

“Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.”
(Romans 15:2)

REFLECTION:

Some thoughts from Henri Nouwen, who writes of neighborliness so beautifully:

“We become neighbors when we are willing to cross the road for one another. There is a lot of road crossing to do. We are all very busy in our own circles. We have our own people to go to and our own affairs to take care of. But if we could cross the road once in a while and pay attention to what is happening on the other side, we might indeed become neighbors.”

(From Henri J. Nouwen’s *Bread for the Journey*)

PRAYER:

Help me cross the road today, God. May I move from fear and isolation and reach out to a life of mutuality, of respect and regard for my neighbors. Amen.



Day 33

“As I stood on a corner and looked out on the scene, all my senses were alive, coaxed to full attentiveness by vibrant colors, bright chimes in the wind, the cool sound of a saxophone. . . . The street was full of people of all sorts, white, black, and brown, young and old, from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Children were laughing and running up and down the street with balloons. Neighbors greeted one another. . . . The energy, the creativity—how wonderful it was!”

(Grounded, p. 235)

SCRIPTURE:

In the last days it will be, God declares,
That I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . .
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
In those days I will pour out my Spirit.
(Acts 2:17–18)

REFLECTION:

For generations, we expected that God would show up in our buildings—churches, synagogues, and temples of all sorts. But one of the most important stories of the New Testament makes the point the God shows up with the crowd, on the streets. The Spirit knows no boundaries, especially walls we erect to try to mark the holy as distinct from the world.

PRAYER:

“Loving God:
You have given all peoples one common origin,



and your will is to gather them as one family in yourself.
Fill the hearts of all with the fire of your love
and the desire to ensure justice for all our sisters and brothers.
By sharing the good things you give us
may we secure justice and equality for every human being,
an end to all division,
and a human society built on love and peace.”
(From Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987)

Day 34

“Spirituality is about personal experience . . . but [not]
for the sake of feeling good, individual prosperity, or
guaranteeing a blessed afterlife. It is about tracing the
threads of the interconnected universe, about finding
God in nature and community—and, in finding God,
discovering that we really are one.”

(*Grounded*, p. 238)

SCRIPTURE:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer



them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

(Matthew 25:34–40)

REFLECTION:

It is really very simple: When we care for one another, we encounter God. When we experience the Spirit, we care for one another. Everyone, everything is connected through love. We need to live in that reality. That’s sacred math.

PRAYER:

O God, do not let my desire for your Spirit isolate me from the world in which you dwell. May my experience of you, of Love, lead me into risky compassion for the common good.

Day 35

“For far too long, religion has combined with nationalism or ethnicity to claim divine legitimacy for human conquests and crusades, a historical Gordian knot if ever there was one. In the twenty-first century, we can no longer live with this problem, for the knot will surely become a noose for the whole human race.”

(Grounded, p. 242)

SCRIPTURE:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

(Revelation 7:9)



REFLECTION:

“We have inherited a large house, a great ‘world house’ in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interest, who because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.”

(From *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967)

PRAYER:

“God,
You are the source of human dignity,
and it is in your image that we are created.
Pour out on us the spirit of love and compassion.
Enable us to reverence each person,
to reach out to anyone in need,
to value and appreciate those who differ from us,
to share the resources of our nation,
to receive the gifts offered to us
by people from other cultures.
Grant that we may always promote
the justice and acceptance
that ensures lasting peace and racial harmony.
Help us to remember that we are one world and one family.
Amen.”

(From the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council)



Day 36

“We generally do not judge economic or political systems on the basis of compassion withheld or inspired—although perhaps we should. We do judge religion this way, because religion insists that compassion is the whole purpose of any sort of spirituality or morality or ethics. When religion fails at compassion, it fails at its own test. To neglect loving your neighbor—to lack compassion—that is *the* problem underlying all other human problems.

(*Grounded*, p. 259)

SCRIPTURE:

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

(Colossians 3:12–14)

REFLECTION:

What does it mean to “clothe” myself with compassion? Or, as another translation says, “put on compassionate hearts”? Compassion means simply, “being with suffering.” What would my world look like today wrapped in compassion, if I allowed myself to be with suffering? Certainly, Christians believe that Jesus was “clothed with compassion.” Christians understand approaching his passion—The Passion of Christ. What if we were to think of Holy Week as The Great Compassion of God? God being with suffering, all the pain of the universe.



PRAYER:

Am I courageous enough to enter into feeling the grace of God's Compassion?

"It seemed to me that I could feel the Passion of Christ strongly, but yet I longed by God's grace to feel it more intensely. . . . It suddenly occurred to me that I should entreat our Lord . . . so that he would fill my whole body with remembrance for the feeling of his blessed Passion . . . for I wanted his pains to be my pains, with compassion, and then longing for God. Yet in this I never asked for a bodily sight or any kind of showing of God, but for fellow-suffering, such as it seemed to me a naturally kind soul might feel for our Lord Jesus, who was willing to become a mortal man for love. I wanted to suffer with him, while living in my mortal body, as God would give me grace."

(Prayer of Julian of Norwich, ca. 1390)

Day 37

In a sermon by the Reverend Oran Warder, he said "We share a common life—we share a common journey—and we are forever bound together by God's divine love. . . . Maybe moments that hold compassionate promise happen more often than we notice."

(*Grounded*, p. 266)

SCRIPTURE:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!

(Isaiah 49:1)



And God passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”

(Exodus 34:6)

REFLECTION:

Compassion is the very being, the nature of God. Compassion is the binding thread between human beings. And compassion is a way of being in the world. Compassion exists as part of the reality of the universe; it is that which births us and nurtures us, and it is something we practice. Every moment of our lives is made possible by compassion and challenged by the call to compassion. Compassion is God, life, and the way.

PRAYER:

May my heart be open, that I might be with you, O God, with others, and act with love for and in the world.

Day 38

“The Bible begins in a perfect garden and ends with a sacred city. And that sacred city draws together nature and human community into an intimate relationship with God, the One who dwells in the midst of it all. Here on earth.”

(*Grounded*, p. 270)

SCRIPTURE:

See the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;



They will be his peoples,
And God himself will be with them.
(Revelation 21:3)

REFLECTION:

Revelation is one of the most difficult books in the Bible. Yet, despite how easily it can be misinterpreted, the point is amazingly simple: God's love overcomes all the violence and pain of human history. The direction of history moves toward wholeness, the re-creation of all things, and union with goodness, beauty, and justice.

PRAYER:

May I live this day with my heart directed toward the consummation of history, the fullness of God's compassionate dream to dwell with us here.

Day 39

“Spirituality is not just about sitting in a room encountering a mystical god in meditation or about seeing God in a sunset. Awe is the gateway to compassion. It is a deep awareness that we are creators, creators who work with the Creator, in an ongoing project of crafting a world. If we do not like the world or are afraid of it, we have had a hand in that. And if we made a mess, we can clean it up and do better. We are what we make.”

(Grounded, p. 275)



SCRIPTURE:

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!"

(Revelation 22:17)

REFLECTION:

The best of the Christian tradition has always known that contemplation and active compassion are of a piece. Spirituality animates justice; goodness is dependent on a heart shaped in prayer. These things go together. When they are separated, our lives are diminished. Awe is an invitation to make a better world and to love our neighbors. The Spirit calls us to creative compassion.

PRAYER:

Creator: Open my eyes to awe. Open my heart to compassion. Weave together the threads of wonder and justice in the fabric of my soul. And by grace and with courage, I accept your invitation to come and join you in crafting a better world.

Day 40
Palm Sunday (Lenten Cycle)

ECCENTRIC TREE

by Diana Butler Bass (2016)

*Eccentric tree,
lofty and lithe:
shadeless rod with
roughened fronds—
misfit wood.*



*You alone from forests of arboreal majesty
offered expectant masses
sacred fans for fervid alleluias
and carpeting grace.*

*Gazing from holy height
Did you join the song?
Or bow in the holy breeze
As the One rode by?*

*Perhaps in doing so, you redeemed your race:
For another of your kin, a more mundane timber, gave stake and beam,
But you gifted glory.*

A Final Reflection Easter Sunday (Lenten Cycle)

“Jesus lives. Jesus is Lord. . . . Easter is about all of this.
To reduce it to a spectacular miracle a long time ago and
a hope for an afterlife is to diminish it and domesticate
it. It is not about heaven. It is about the transformation
of this world.”

(Marcus Borg, 2012)

