



You're Invited to:

**Maundy Thursday: April 5**  
**Home Dinner Fellowship**  
(sign up sheets in church Narthex:  
everyone is invited to join a home  
dinner in your area)

**Good Friday: April 6**  
**Prayer Vigil: Sanctuary**  
**7:30 Communion Service**

**Easter Services: April 7**  
**9:30AM and 11AM**

**First Christian Church of Burbank**  
**221 S. Sixth St.**  
**Burbank CA 91506**  
**[www.burbankchristian.org](http://www.burbankchristian.org)**  
**(818)845-7459**

## Lenten Devotional - 2012

### Pastor's Introduction

The notion of 'paradox' has been a helpful concept for me in my faith journey. The writings of Thomas Merton and Parker Palmer have been instrumental to me in illuminating the practice of "holding the tensions of faith." In my retreat experiences with the Center for Courage and Renewal, we often use poetry as means of tapping into the tensions of our faith and life journeys.

Winton Boyd, a UCC pastor and a facilitator for the Center for Courage and Renewal, informed me that he had used a Lenten Devotional based on the Paradoxes of this Season. I asked Winton if I could 'borrow' the devotional for use in my own congregation. Winton forwarded me the following devotional and asked that Barbara Hummel (also a UCC pastor and a facilitator for the Center for Courage and Renewal) be given credit for compiling and editing the devotional.

I originally began to make 'edits' myself, wondering if certain poems or writings might be more valuable or appropriate for our congregation. I eventually resisted such a temptation. I'm sure the readers will have varied reactions to the various readings. But, I shouldn't impose my perspective to find poems that are agreeable to everyone. This would

diminish the role of a devotional considerably. So as the poems and writings create stirrings in your soul (perhaps positive, negative, or apathetic), I pray you will listen deeply to this stirrings. Often times I learn more from a poem or writing that troubles me. I think of Jesus' parables and the soul growth they can birth when I pay attention to the discomfort and tension they create within me.

Other than the dates, I made only minor formatting changes and present to you the devotion as it was presented to me. May the grace of God that underlies all, be present to you during this Lenten Season, and may this devotional help in the journey.

To share our lenten thoughts and meditations with one another - a blog site has been set up at:  
[www.burbankchristianlent.wordpress.com](http://www.burbankchristianlent.wordpress.com)

Steve Borgard - Pastor

## **Lent - Exploring our Faith through the Paradoxes of the Season**

Lent begins with the recognition of our mortality on Ash Wednesday, and ends with the promise of resurrection life on Easter. In its beginning and end, as well as the entire journey therein, Lent offers an opportunity to explore the many paradoxes of our faith and our yearning for to know God. By paradox, we mean the recognition that seemingly opposed ideas/realities can be held in creative and spiritual balance.

We will be exploring 7 paradoxes in a number of ways through the season:

- o Honesty and Denial
- o Courage and Fear
- o Faithfulness and Doubt
- o Pride and Humility
- o Intentionality and Serendipity
- o Life and Death

These paradoxes are not an either/or reality, nor are they a description of “good” and “bad” faith. They are simply part of the life of faith as we know and live it. We may explore the edges of one of these paradoxes more than another; we may feel a need for greater awareness about one more than others.

During Lent, we want to root our congregation’s journey in these inherent realities as we live them, wrestle with them, pray about them. In an effort to live our desire to strengthen and deepen our relationships with God, each other and the wider world - we invite you to reflect on how these play out in your life at this time.

## Paradox

Wednesday, February 22

### PARADOX

It is a paradox that we encounter so much internal noise when we first try to sit in silence.

It is a paradox that experiencing pain releases pain.

It is a paradox that keeping still can lead us so fully into life and being.

Our minds do not like paradoxes. We want things to be clear, so we can maintain our illusions of safety. Certainty breeds tremendous smugness.

We each possess a deeper level of being, however, which loves paradox. It knows that summer is already growing like a seed in the depth of winter. It knows that the moment we are born, we begin to die. It knows that all of life shimmers, in shades of becoming—that shadow and light are always together, the visible mingled with the invisible.

When we sit in stillness we are profoundly active. Keeping silent, we can hear the roar of existence. Through our willingness to be the one we are, we become one with everything.

--Gunilla Norris  
from *Sharing Silence*

Thursday, February 23

Contradiction, paradox, the tension of opposites: These have always been at the heart of my experience, and I think I am not alone. I am tugged one way and then the other. My beliefs and my actions often seem at odds. My strengths are sometimes cancelled by my weaknesses. My self, and the world around me, seem more a study in dissonance than a harmony of the integrated whole.

More than once I have despaired at the corrosive effect of these contradictions on my “spiritual life.” I had thought that living spiritually required a resolution of all contraries and tensions before one could hope, as it were, to earn one’s wings. But as I labored to remove the contradictions before presenting myself to God, my spiritual life became a continual preliminary attraction, never quite getting to the main event. I thought I was living in the spirit by railing against life’s inconsistencies when, in fact, I was becoming more frustrated, more anxious, more withdrawn from those vital places in life where contradiction always lurks... Perhaps contradictions are not impediments to the spiritual life, but an integral part of it.

--Parker J. Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox*

### Friday, February 24

The promise of paradox is the promise that apparent opposites, like order and disorder, can cohere in our lives, the promise that if we replace either-or with both-and, our lives will become larger and more filled with light. It is the promise at the heart of every wisdom tradition.

--Thomas Merton

### Saturday, February 25

At once, there is nothing new and yet no one has ever lived what you are about to live. This is a timeless paradox that we frequently fall to either side of. Accepting one without the other can suppress or seduce us into a false, imbalanced life. When we accept that *nothing is new* as our primary truth, we can slip into a state of insignificance that is defeating: *What do I matter? What does anything matter?* Yet the other side alone is just as dangerous. When we accept that *everything is possible and dependent on our actions* as our primary truth, we can puff up into a state of grandiosity: *I can change the world; everything depends on what I do.*

But just as we need two eyes in order to perceive depth, we need both aspects of this paradox in order to perceive the depth of the Universe. For the fact that nothing is new quiets our conquering will back into humility. And the fact

that everything is possible lifts our defeated insignificance into awe. Together, humility and awe enable us to face the raw power of life that is always present and at work behind our one-sided commitments to surviving and escaping pain.

-- Mark Nepo

### Sunday, February 26

True faith can only grow and mature if it includes the elements of paradox and creative doubt. Such doubt is not the enemy of faith but an essential element of it. For faith in God does not bring the false peace of answered questions and resolved paradoxes.

--Kenneth Leech, Anglican priest

## Honesty and Denial

### Monday, February 27

#### It Is I Who Must Begin

It is I who must begin.  
Once I begin, once I try—  
here and now,  
right where I am,  
not excusing myself by saying that things  
would be easier elsewhere,  
without grand speeches and  
ostentatious gestures,  
but all the more persistently  
—to live in harmony  
with the “voice of being,” as I  
understand it within myself  
—as soon as I begin that,  
I suddenly discover,  
to my surprise, that  
I am neither the only one,  
nor the first,  
nor the most important one  
to have set out  
upon that road.

Whether all is really lost  
or not depends entirely on  
whether or not I am lost.

--Vaclav Havel

### Tuesday, February 28

It's a story I've kept largely to myself for fifteen years. My marriage of 21 years had hit an insurmountable wall, and yet for nine months I kept up my public routines while suffering alone and in silence. It was only when I was at the Easter service, powerfully hearing the story of resurrection again, that I knew I had to face the ending of the relationship and all that that meant. The honesty of the denial became too large to continue, and with that choice, a new chapter in my life began.

-- Barb Hummel

### Wednesday, February 29

Anxiety is the mark of spiritual insecurity. It is the fruit of unanswered questions. But questions cannot go unanswered unless they first be asked. And there is a far worse anxiety, a far worse insecurity, which comes from being afraid to ask the right questions--because they might turn out to have no answer. One of the moral diseases we communicate to one another in society comes from huddling together in the pale light of an insufficient answer to a question we are afraid to ask.

--Thomas Merton

### Thursday, March 1

The crowded bus, the long queue, the railway platform, the traffic jam, the neighbor's television sets, the heavy-footed people on the floor above you, the person who still keeps getting the wrong number on your phone. These are the real conditions of your desert. Do not allow yourself to be irritated. Do not try to escape. Do not postpone your prayer. Kneel down. Enter that disturbed solitude. Let your silence be spoiled by those sounds. It is the beginning of your desert.

--Alessandro Pronzato, *Meditations on the Sand*

### Friday, March 2

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight inside the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

--Anais Nin

### Saturday, March 3

Wayne Muller speaks of the courage to see what's whole beneath what's broken. Consider as well what the French writer Andre Gide suggests when he says, "If you go deeply enough into the personal, you reach the Universal." These insights imply that what's broken and whole are not forks in the road, but that one waits beneath the other; namely, a Universal Wholeness waits beneath our brokenness, the way a seed pod torn completely lets all the seeds populate

the earth. A good deal of our suffering comes from not going deeply enough into the personal to make it through and so we get stuck between the surface and the deep. Often, the pain of being stuck makes us afraid to go deeper, when that is exactly what we need in order to restore our inner health. And so, the question becomes: Am I leaning through my brokenness enough to touch the restoring Wholeness of life?

The Sufi Master Ibn al-'Arabī speaks of this in another way. He describes the nature of human awareness as a moment-by-moment shift in perception, so that each instant reveals a new vision of God. In the moment that we enter what is broken and personal, we can see God present underneath our pain, and in the moment that we are stuck in what is broken and personal, we experience what seems like God's absence in the midst of our pain, and so on. It's as if we experience God blinking when it is we in our humanness and stubbornness who look away. Ibn al-'Arabī implies that this is how God discloses Himself to us through our humanity: moment by blinking moment, through His ongoing presence and our intermittent reception of it, and by breaking our trance so we might have another chance to apprehend the Whole. Our challenge as aware beings is not to dwell on how the world keeps falling apart, but to secure real knowledge in how to endure this holy process of how we are repeatedly taken apart and put back together, which is happening as you read this.

--Mark Nepo

### Sunday, March 4

Unfortunately, in seeing ourselves as we truly are, not all that we see is beautiful and attractive. This is undoubtedly part of the reason we flee silence. We do not want to be confronted with our hypocrisy, our phoniness. We see how false and fragile is the false self we project. We have to go through this painful experience to come to our true self.

It is a harrowing journey, a death to self---the false self---and no one wants to die. But it is the only path to life, to freedom, to peace, to true love. And it begins with silence. We cannot give ourselves in love if we do not know and possess ourselves. This is the great value of silence. It is the pathway to all we truly want.

-- M. Basil Pennington

## Courage and Fear

### Monday, March 5

Why fear the dark?  
How can we help but love it  
when it is the darkness  
that brings the stars to us?  
What's more: who does not know  
that it is on the darkest nights  
that the stars acquire  
their greatest splendor?

-- Dom Helder Camara (1909-1999),  
Brazilian Catholic archbishop

### Tuesday, March 6

Courage is not the absence of fear; courage is the recognition that some things are more important than fear. Far more important than fear is *voice*: having it and using it on behalf of others who don't yet have the privilege of it. What I'm choosing to do is to ask questions out

loud... Questions introduce us to the messiness-- and, therefore, the adventure-- of being human.

--Irshad Manji, Senior Fellow with the European Foundation for Democracy and author of *The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*

### Wednesday, March 7

The purpose of Lent is ... above all a preparation to rejoice in God's love. And this preparation consists in receiving the gift of God's mercy - a gift which we receive in so far as we open our hearts to it, casting out what cannot remain in the same room with mercy.

Now one of the things we must cast out first of all is fear. Fear narrows the little entrance of our heart. It shrinks up our capacity to love. It freezes up our power to give ourselves. If we were terrified of God as an inexorable judge, we would not confidently await God's mercy, or approach God trustfully in prayer. Our peace, our joy in Lent are a guarantee of grace.

-- Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration*

### Thursday, March 8

Courage is not the towering oak that sees storms come and go,  
it is the fragile blossom that opens in the snow.

-- Alice Mackenzie Swaim

## Friday, March 9

Sara was severely burned in a gas fire when she was nine. Her traumatic fear of fire grew to dominate her life. If someone left a gas grill on while eating, she began to sweat. It was more than thirty years later, in her forties, that she woke with the notion that she must go back into the fire; must replace that awful life-changing moment with another.

She had been working with firefighters and so they set up a controlled fire. She wore a fire-suit and walked into the flames and just stood there, at first feeling protected by her fear which had become a fire-suit all its own. Slowly, her fear started to melt and she began to see through the intense heat. The world was waiting beyond the flames. She opened her palms and watched the tall flames curl around her fingers without being able to burn her. As she walked out of the fire, she could feel the wall of heat part behind her. As the coolness of simple air surrounded her again, she could feel her heart-cramped so far inside for more than thirty years-she could feel it relax, even expand.

For Sara, the fire was actual. For many of us, our pain is real enough, but the fire is often a wound or fear that keeps burning us up. This is why we need a controlled fire to go back into without getting hurt. It is difficult to listen to life, each other, the voice of Spirit, if everything is muffled and distorted through the constant flames of pain or fear.

... Going back into the fire: Is there anything more brave or kind that we can do for ourselves or the world?

--Mark Nepo

## Saturday, March 10

A gesture of love is anything we do that helps others discover their humanity. Any act where we turn to one another. Open our hearts. Extend ourselves. Listen. Any time we're patient. Curious. Quiet. Engaged.... Conversation does this---it requires that we extend ourselves, that we open our minds and hearts a bit more, that we turn to someone, curious about how they live their life.

Speaking to each other involves risk. It's often difficult to extend ourselves, to let down our guard, especially with those we fear or avoid. When we're willing to overcome our fear and speak to them, that is a gesture of love. Strangely, what we say is not that important. We have ended the silence that keeps us apart.

--Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another*

## Sunday, March 11

Can we carry the burden of reality? How can we remain open to all human tragedies and aware of the vast ocean of human suffering without becoming mentally paralyzed and depressed? How can we live a healthy and creative life when we are constantly reminded of the fate of the millions who are poor, sick, hungry and persecuted? How can we even smile when we keep being confronted by pictures of tortures and executions?



What keeps us from opening ourselves to the reality of the world? Could it be that we cannot accept our powerlessness and are only willing to see those wounds that we can heal? But life can teach us that although the events of the day are out of our hands, they should never be out of our hearts, that instead of becoming bitter our lives can yield to the wisdom that only from the heart a creative response can come forth.

-- Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out*

## Faithfulness and Doubt

### Monday, March 12

Remember when Jimmy Stewart in "It's a Wonderful Life" is brought back to reality by his angel showing him all the difference his bank has made in his hometown? This year it reminded me to think of the difference in the world if ORUCC wasn't here. It is so easy to take the positives in our lives for granted.

Lots of Sunday mornings I think, can I really find the umph to get myself organized and get to church? But when I do find it I'm always rewarded. First there is the gift of new light shined on ordinary every day problems by extraordinary preaching. Then there is the friendship and caring - both that which I receive from my church family and that which I am enabled to give to others. Finally, there is the opportunity to reach out to the world and make some small difference in a very positive concrete way, whether it

is writing a letter to someone imprisoned unjustly, helping to shelter the homeless, or even just dropping an extra dollar into the plate for the Compassion offering.

And it's not just me. Because ORUCC is here on this corner there is a place people can come to if they feel "different" and long for acceptance, or if they want to believe it really does make a difference if they try to follow the teachings of Jesus and walk humbly with God. Because ORUCC is here people have a place they can come and get help with their troubles when life seems overwhelming, teens have a place that will take them on summer mission trips and teach them they can make a difference in the world, young children have a place where they are loved and valued and celebrated (cont...)

just because God made them. We all have a place, small children, teens, adults, old folks, where we can make beautiful music together.

Because of ORUCC hungry people are fed, those without homes are sheltered, there is more justice in the world, and more hope, and there is more kindness.

This place we have here didn't just happen. It happened through all the faith and love and sweat and vision and disagreement and reconciliation of many people over many years trying to do what we perceive as God's will. It is a beautiful creation. The cup is more than half full. But God isn't finished with us yet and neither are we finished with this Great Work of our church. Thank you God for guiding us in this creation. May we humbly continue to appreciate, celebrate, and follow your light at ORUCC.

--Dianne Stevens

### Tuesday, March 13

Faith is not knowledge of what the mystery of the universe is, but the conviction that there is a mystery, and that it is greater than us.

-- Rabbi David Wolpe, *Making Loss Matter*

### Wednesday, March 14

The question from agnosticism is,  
Who turned on the light?  
The question from faith is,  
Whatever for?

--Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

"To demand that others should provide you with textbook answers is like asking a strange woman to give birth to your baby. There are insights that can be born only of your own pain, and they are the most precious."

--Janusz Korczak

### Thursday, March 15

To be alive is not primarily a linear experience. It's a mix of dreaming and running to the store for a quart of milk. Our lives have depth, in part, because we can't make sense of everything. Life doesn't make sense; it's more complicated than our linear way of knowing. Mystery and spirit run through our days like rivers and sustain us. Life is a blend of possibility and impossibility.... From chaos comes clarity. It was there all along. You

just couldn't see it. To come to clarity, you have to enter the chaos. Dive in or enter inch by inch. Confusion is not a bad thing.

--Patrice Vecchione, *Writing and the Spiritual Life*

### Friday, March 16

In nature, we are quietly given countless models of how to give ourselves over to what appears dark and hopeless, but which ultimately is an awakening beyond all imagining. All around us, everything small and buried surrenders to a process that none of the buried parts can see. We call this process seeding. And this innate surrender allows everything edible and fragrant to break ground into a life of light that we call spring. As a seed buried in the earth can't imagine itself as an orchid or hyacinth, neither can a heart packed with hurt or a mind filmed over with despair imagine itself loved or at peace. The courage of the seed is that, once cracking, it cracks all the way. This moving through the dark into blossom is the threshold to God. And the devotion of the living to move through the dark into blossom is the work of soul.

--Mark Nepo

No ray of sunlight is ever lost, but the green which it awakens into existence needs time to sprout, and it is not always granted to the sower to see the harvest. All work that is worth anything is done in faith.

--Albert Schweitzer

### Saturday, March 17

Faith is the quality that allows us to find a way to go on, to feel empowered, to, no matter what, keep on trying. This is not a sentimental faith that everything will be just fine, according to our wishes or our timetable. Rather, it is an awakened faith that inspires us to step forward into the center of our lives--to participate, to link up, to reach out to others and let others reach out to us, to work for a better world. And it is a vitality of faith that tells us, however easy it is to forget or be afraid, that the time for communicating, for loving, for risking, for trying, has got to be now.

--Sharon Salzberg

### Sunday, March 18

When learning how to swim, it's natural enough to resist the initial sinking in the water. We seem to be going down. And the more we struggle at the surface, the stronger the pull seems, wanting to take us under. But when we can relax into the water, we settle a few inches into the miracle of buoyancy. Amazingly, the unseen depths hold us up.

This moment in learning how to swim reveals the essence of faith. Forget all the definitions and debates. It's as simple and difficult as swimming in the ocean of experience and learning how to trust the unseen depths of life to hold us up. We don't have to name that depth or send messages to it or pray in the dark

to it. We simply have to surrender to it enough to feel its buoyancy. Yet these are the most difficult two inches to travel on earth.

--Mark Nepo

### **Pride and Humility**

### Monday, March 19

If I try to be or do something noble that has nothing to do with who I am, I may look good to others and to myself for a while. But the fact that I am exceeding my limits will eventually have consequences. I will distort myself, the other, and our relationship---and may end up doing more damage than if I had never set out to do this particular "good." When I try to do something that is not in my nature or the nature of the relationship, way will close behind me.... When the gift I give to the other is integral to my own nature, when it comes from a place of organic reality within me, it will renew itself---and me---even as I give it away.

--Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*

### Tuesday, March 20

Think...of falling as a figure of speech. We fall on our faces, we fall for a joke, we fall for someone, we fall in love. In each of these falls, what do we fall away from? We fall from ego, we fall from our carefully constructed identities...we fall, at least temporarily, from reason...We fall into passion, into terror, into unreasoning joy...We fall, at last, into the presence of the sacred.

-- Philip Simmons, *Learning to Fall*

### Wednesday, March 21

It is one thing to say with the prophet Amos, 'Let justice roll down like mighty waters,' and quite another to work out the irrigation system. Clearly there is more certainty in the recognition of wrongs than there is in the prescription for their cure.

--William Sloane Coffin

### Thursday, March 22

At once, there is nothing new and yet no one has ever lived what you are about to live. This is a timeless paradox that we frequently fall to either side of. Accepting one without the other can suppress or seduce us into a false, imbalanced life. When we accept that *nothing is new* as our primary truth, we can slip into a state of insignificance that is defeating: *What do I matter? What does anything matter?* Yet the other side alone is just as dangerous. When we accept that *everything is possible and dependent on our actions* as our primary truth, we can puff up into a state of grandiosity: *I can change the world; everything depends on what I do.*

But just as we need two eyes in order to perceive depth, we need both aspects of this paradox in order to perceive the depth of the Universe. For the fact that nothing is new quiets our conquering will back into humility. And the fact that everything is possible lifts our defeated insignificance into awe. Together, humility (cont...)

and awe enable us to face the raw power of life that is always present and at work behind our one-sided commitments to surviving and escaping pain.

So when feeling insignificant as a bug or like a pharaoh in search of your pyramid, it helps to remember that sunrise is the act of turning toward a light that is always there. The sun doesn't rise for us. We turn to it and the day begins. Likewise, when we stop pretending that things rise before us, the truth and majesty of things reveal themselves. Then, through humility and awe, facing and bowing become the same act of praise.

--Mark Nepo

### Friday, March 23

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.

--Carl Rogers

I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.

--Maya Angelou

### Saturday, March 24

It is useless to try to make peace with ourselves by being pleased with everything we have done. In order to settle down in the quiet of our own being we must learn to be detached from the results of our own activity. We must withdraw ourselves, to some extent, from the effects that are beyond our control and be content with the good will and the work that are the quiet expression of our inner life. We must be content to live without watching ourselves live, to work without expecting any immediate reward, to love without an instantaneous satisfaction, and to exist without any special recognition.

--Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*

## Sunday, March 25

In his collection of Bengali poems, Gitanjali, Rabindranath Tagore writes that the song he wanted to sing has never happened because he has spent his days 'stringing and unstringing' his instrument. Whenever I read these lines a certain sadness enters my soul. I think of how busy my days and nights are, of how I cram my calendar and my life so full at times that my glimpses of God are like a rare and endangered species. I yearn to have the song of God sung in my soul but I, too, keep stringing and unstringing my instrument. I get so preoccupied with the details and pressure of my schedule, with the hurry and worry of life, that I miss the song of goodness which is waiting to be sung through me....

--Joyce Rupp, OSM

## **Intentionality and Serendipity**

### Monday, March 26

One of my volunteer activities is to cuddle babies at Meriter Hospital in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU). I had heard about this opportunity long ago during a Mission Moment given by Carolyn Carlson, I acted on it., and I love doing it. I've been at it for several years now.

Besides my delight in holding babies, I have become acquainted with some extraordinary caregivers. One is Karen, who impressed me from the outset with her calm and loving way. Over time, I learned that Karen and her husband are committed Christians who led mission trips to various underserved countries. She was able to use her health care knowledge while her husband used his building skills. Before a trip to Tanzania, she mentioned that she needed to take certain medical supplies that she had not yet located. I mentioned to her the Sharing Resources Worldwide group that our church learned of through Lu Ann Greiner. Karen contacted that group and was able to get what she needed.

I learned later that shortly after they had unpacked the equipment they had taken to a hospital in Arusha, Tanzania, Karen was called on to put some of it to use. A woman had just delivered a baby with a cord around its neck; it was not breathing and had no pulse. By immediately using CPR and then some of the equipment, she resuscitated the baby. It was a dramatic event at the time, and the story also found an appreciative audience among the NICU caregivers.

Whenever Karen is on duty and I am there as a cuddler, I try to touch base with her. Recently, she came into the room where I was holding a baby and asked me, "Do you think your church might be interested in contributing to a medical clinic we want to build in Tanzania?"

What an interesting question for her to ask me. She did not know that I chair the Ministry of Christian Witness and Service, which would be meeting the very next night to consider who to support through our Compassion Offerings in the next few months.

I am writing this in the short window between when I talked with Karen and when our Ministry will meet. I do not know whether the Ministry will agree to Karen's group as a Compassion Offering recipient, but I cannot help but marvel at the coincidences that brought Karen's interest and mine into synchrony.

Would this be *serendipity* or God's *intentionality* if ORUCC were to make a fruitful connection that would benefit this village in Tanzania?

--Jan Christian

(Note: The Ministry of Christian Witness and Service has designated the March Compassion Offering to this project.)

### Tuesday, March 27

If there is a temptation in the Christian life, it is probably contemplation. Physicians talk to us about "stress;" psychologists talk to us about "burnout;" sociologists talk to us about achieving "space;" educators talk to us about reflection and "process." And we all come lusting for a cave to crawl into to do it, or at least a little cottage on a hill overlooking the water, or even a small log cabin in the woods. Any place as long as it's someplace appropriate; some place not here; some place simple but comfortable, of course. A place for my books, my typewriter, my tape recorder. Just me and my God. Or is it me and the gods I've made?

If there is a sin in the Christian life it is probably action. We talk about "strategizing" and "mobilizing" and "lobbying" and "renewing" and "aligning" and "reforming" as if it were all up to structures; as if action were enough. We do and do and do. And there's the problem. We set out to *do* something that the world needs, instead of to *be* something that the world needs. We set out to change instead of to illuminate. And we wonder why, with all the changes, nothing ever changes. After all the changes come, there is still the fighting, still the poverty, still the greed, still the exploitation.

Why? Because deep down inside where it counts, there is still the anger, still the arrogance, still the attitudes of control. Except that now I'm the one in control. The Chinese wrote: "Now people exploit people but after the revolution it will be just the opposite."

The contemplative questions for people of action in our day are: Who will *be* and also *do*? How can we *do* and also *be*? The problem of this culture is that we make natural enemies out of prayer and transforming action when the two are really Siamese twins: either without the other is incomplete.

-- Joan Chittister, OSB

### Wednesday, March 28

If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.

--E. B. White

What you can plan is too small for you to live.

--David Whyte

### Thursday, March 29

There are some things in life over which we have no control, probably most things. We discover in the course of our lives that reality refuses to bow to our commands. Another force, sometimes with a sense of humor, usually comes into play with different plans. We are forced to let go when we want so much to hold on, and to hold on when we want so much to let go. Our lives – all our lives – include unexpected twists, unwanted endings, and challenges of every puzzling kind. Reinhold Niebuhr, an American Protestant theologian, composed a prayer that has become the cornerstone of the recovery

movement: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the (cont...)

difference." This is a profound aspiration. But what are

the things we cannot change? Are they unique to each of us, or are there some things that all of us must acknowledge and accept in order to find peace in our lives? . . .

There are five unavoidable givens, five immutable facts that come to visit all of us many times over:

1. Everything changes and ends.
2. Things do not always go according to plan.
3. Life is not always fair.
4. Pain is part of life.
5. People are not loving and loyal all the time.

These are the core challenges that we all face. But too often we live in denial of these facts. We behave as if somehow these givens aren't always in effect, or not applicable to all of us. But when we oppose these five basic truths we resist reality, and life then becomes an endless series of disappointments, frustrations, and sorrows. . .

The phrase "accepting the things we cannot change" makes it seem that we accept things only because we cannot change them. Actually, once we understand that what happens beyond our control may be just what we need, we see that acceptance of reality can be our way of participating in our own evolution. Serenity comes not only from accepting what we cannot change but from giving up trying to be in control. There is meaning in events that happen, and this meaning is multileveled.

– David Richo, *The Five Things We Cannot Change . . . and the Happiness We Find by Embracing Them*

### Friday, March 30

You do not need to know precisely what is happening or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment and to embrace them with courage, faith, and hope.

--Thomas Merton

### Saturday, March 31

In the journey to social justice, small steps sometimes lead to unexpected leaps of progress.

--Robert Thurman

A person of spirit has the ability to see those around them as spiritual beings or participants in a much larger plan. True greatness is recognizing that, as much as we think we are creating our own life, there is actually a larger scheme of things operating. There is a greater picture that operates beyond what we are individually capable of knowing.

--Anthea Church

## Sunday, April 1

Patience is not waiting passively until someone else does something. Patience asks us to live the moment to the fullest, to be completely present to the moment, to taste the here and now, to be where we are. When we are impatient, we try to get away from where we are. We behave as if the real thing will happen tomorrow, later, and somewhere else. Be patient and trust that the treasure you are looking for is hidden in the ground on which you stand.

-- Henri J.M. Nouwen

## **Life and Death**

### Monday, April 2

Interplay between Life and Death. After the life and death of Jesus, the resurrection of the spirit of God portrays a beautiful experience that I feel many people would like to duplicate in their own lives.

Before we can truly live, we must let go of this life as we know it. We must let go of the strong attachment to material possessions and old ideas that at one time seemed so very important to us. If we can find acceptance of every day and every interaction with God's creatures as a gift from God, we can attempt to find our own "resurrection," --- the time when we will become one with the deity. Some may be deem this to be heaven.

There was a time in my life when I was taught, and I believed, that I was a member of a church that had the only true way to heaven. This particular belief has caused much distress in not only my life but also in the lives of many people that I have known and loved.

Now I have found that the time in my life when I am most comfortable with myself is when I "let go" of the old tapes --- letting go of all that old baggage, the prejudices, the preconceived ideas, and all the other times when I was sure that I was right and everyone else was wrong. It feels a lot better to "accept" that there are other ways to look at a particular situation or belief. We each view the situation or belief from our particular universe, and the way we see the solution for ourselves is the "right" solution. It is entirely possible to accept another viewpoint without being judgmental.

For me, finding this time of acceptance of new ideas, of being open to new ways of thinking, was a very important time in my life. I could not fill my mind with new thoughts if I was unwilling to part with the old. To paraphrase a great teacher, I needed to empty my cup of the old wine, before I could add the new wine. This, I believe, is one part of living a life, "dying," and being "resurrected." Therefore, in order to **live**, we truly must let our old selves, as we know ourselves, die and become the new self, one with the deity.

--Anonymous (ORUCC member)



## Tuesday, April 3

Throughout 14 years in the Wisconsin Air National Guard, our chaplain's office sponsored Christmas caroling at UW/VA hospitals during our December drill weekend. We had song books, and I would call out the key for our guitar player. If we knew a patient was former military, we would sing that person's military branch song. It always amazed me to see the former marines at the VA hospital get out of bed and stand at attention when we sang their branch song!

One year when caroling, I ran into a friend, Lily, a nurse, whose husband John (not their real names) was in intensive care and on life support. This was at least a second marriage for both of them. They had been married one year, and this day was the day of their one-year anniversary. Not only that, John's condition was such that Lily was making a decision that day on whether or not to take John off life support. I asked Lily if she thought our caroling group could visit John and her. Lily was okay with it. I told her we'd try to get up to the intensive care wing.

We were nearing the end of caroling that day. I had told our group about Lily and John. Winding through the maze of UW hospitals, I wasn't sure if we should continue to find the intensive care. Others in the group wanted to go forward, so we pressed on. I am so glad we did.

We found the intensive care, and Lily and John. Staff presented no objections to our caroling group, and Lily only asked me that we not sing "We Wish You A Merry Christmas." I asked her if "Silent Night" was okay, and she nodded yes. John was hooked up to wires and tubes, a big breathing tube in his mouth, but otherwise lying motionless and seemingly unconscious, and Lily was patiently talking in John's ear, describing me and everything that was going on

with our group. After "Silent Night," someone from our group asked if John had ever served in the military. Lily said, "Air Force? Army? Army!" To which I saw John, who I thought was not awake, jerk his total body in response. "Yes, it was Army," said Lily.

At that moment, I was amazed because I truly saw that John, even though artificially alive and perhaps near death, was still very much there and very much aware of things around him! In a moment, to me, this was almost like witnessing a resurrection of sorts.

So we then sang the Army song. Later, Lily said that John died that night at midnight, wanting to be with her for the full day of their one-year anniversary. And Lily told me that the highlight, the one bright spot of that very difficult day for her, was when our caroling group visited John and her.

To me, the line between life and death is thin, and John brought that home for me. No matter how unaware John may have appeared to me, he still knew what was going on. I am glad to have been part of providing some comfort to Lily and him on his last day in physical life.

--Tim Johnson

Wednesday, April 4

If I am going to die, the best way to  
prepare is to quiet my mind and open my heart.  
If I am going to live, the best way to prepare is to  
quiet my mind and open my heart.

-- Ram Dass

I will not die an unlived life  
I will not live in fear of falling  
Or of catching fire  
I choose to inhabit my days  
To allow my living to open me  
Making me less afraid  
More accessible  
To loosen my heart  
So that it becomes a wing, a torch, a promise  
I choose to risk my significance.  
To live so that that which comes to me as seed  
Goes to the next as blossom  
And that which comes to me as blossom  
Goes on as fruit.

-- Dawna Markova

Thursday, April 5

This is the last year.  
There will be no other,  
but heartless nature  
seemingly relents.  
Never has a winter sun  
spilled so much light,  
never have so many flowers  
dared such early bloom.  
The air is brilliant, sharp.  
Never have I taken  
such long, long breaths.

--Robert Friend, *Dancing With A Tiger*

(after being diagnosed with terminal cancer)

Friday, April 6

Lift up the dead leaves  
and see, waiting  
in the dark, in cold March,

the purplish stems, leaves, and buds of twinleaf,  
infinitely tender, infinitely

expectant. They straighten  
slowly into the light after  
the nights of fronts. At last

the venture is made: the brief  
blossoms open, the petals fall,  
the hinged capsules of seed

grow big. The possibility  
of this return returns  
again to the seed, the dark,

the long wait, and the light again.

--Wendell Berry

Saturday, April 7

*The Thing Is*

to love life, to love it even  
when you have no stomach for it  
and everything you've held dear  
crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,  
your throat filled with the silt of it.  
When grief sits with you, its tropical heat  
thickening the air, heavy as water  
more fit for gills than lungs;  
when grief weights you like your own flesh  
only more of it, an obesity of grief,  
you think, *How can a body withstand this?*  
Then you hold life like a face  
between your palms, a plain face,  
no charming smile, no violet eyes,  
and you say, yes, I will take you  
I will love you, again.

--Ellen Bass