**Daily Devotions**

**January 2022**

*01-01*

“Many are the torments of the wicked,

but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.”

— Psalm 32:10

Happy new year! We’re all subject to the torments of the wicked, aren’t we. We’re told over and over again in a thousand different ways that we’re not good enough. Thus we make resolutions to become good enough in the new year. We’ll exercise more, eat better, take up a new hobby, work harder, make more money, do whatever it takes to be “acceptable” in the eyes of the world, although these messages are so internalized, we believe we are doing it for ourselves. When we buy into the idealized unreality of what the world tries to sell us, we are tormented indeed.

Maybe this year we can resolve not to make resolutions, but instead rest in the steadfast love of God, whose truth destroys the deceptions of the world. This new year, may you know you are loved exactly as you are, and trust God to lead you where you need to go.

Are there ways the negative messages of the world make me feel unworthy?

When do I find myself most in need of good self-care?

*01-02*

“He said to them, ‘Come and see.’”

— John 1:39a

Main Idea: Jesus extends an invitation and a welcome.

The people in the wilderness following John were looking for something. They were living in a land now occupied by Rome, and they were limited in what they could do and say. Their freedom was precarious and their voices were unheard. It’s no surprise they flocked to the wilderness to hear the words of God’s prophets, hoping to hear something that would give them hope for a better life.

It was also a fairly common occurrence that rabbis selected followers that would live with them and learn from them. By immersing themselves in the lives of their teachers, disciples could learn to emulate their teachers, thereby carrying on the teachings throughout generations.

On this day, the prophet John recognized God in Jesus. By pointing him out, John directed the attention of several truth seekers toward Jesus and they followed him intently. When Jesus asked what they were seeking, they requested to follow him for a while with the question, “Where are you staying?” The rabbi, Jesus, extended an invitation that would change their lives forever, “Come and see.”

Throughout this brief passage, the word about Jesus begins to spread like wildfire, and before long Jesus has gathered several disciples ready to follow and learn. He gives some of them new names, a sign that God has redirected their life journey down a different path. It reminds me a little of an endearing relative who gives funny nicknames to the people they love the most.

You know that feeling you get when you climb into the car of a roller coaster and it begins to climb the long, steep hill toward the drop? That’s where we are in Jesus’ ministry. As Jesus gathers disciples, there is an excitement, a nervousness that comes with the anticipation of a wild ride. The journey will be long and difficult, but for now, there is delight and eagerness as Jesus extends the invitation to a journey that cannot be explained, only lived, “Come and see.”

*01-03*

“Come and see what God has done:

he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.”

— Psalm 66:5

Come and see! Such a resounding invitation into the joy of God’s community. Jesus said the same to Philip, who said the same to Nathanael in John’s gospel. The angel said basically the same thing to the Shepherds: Go and see. Don’t take my word for it—come and bear witness to God’s presence in the world.

Look around you. Where do you see God in action? What things bear witness to God’s power and presence? Maybe you’ve experienced the birth of a child, or healing from illness, addiction, or depression. Perhaps there has been a victory, however small, in your work for justice. Maybe you’ve helped out someone who was hurting or in need and recognized Christ in them and in yourself as a servant. In these simple examples and countless others, we can “come and see” what God has done and is doing all around us.

Where do I see God working in my life? My community? The world?

*01-04*

“Let the rebellious not exalt themselves.”

— Psalm 66:7b

Rebelliousness isn’t always a bad thing. There are plenty of unjust laws and cultural expectations that need to be openly defied in an effort to change them. But those kinds of rebels don’t exalt themselves for their rebelliousness—it’s just what needs to be done. There’s even a kind of humility in it, the willingness to be persecuted and even jailed for their efforts. Jesus was a rebel in just that kind of way.

But the Psalmist knows that God’s law is not unjust, but is the highest form of justice (and, yes, we could get into a long-winded argument about the terrible injustices in the laws of Moses, but that’s not what I’m talking about here. I’m talking about God’s perfect law, not the one written down by patriarchal males a few thousand years ago). To rebel against God’s law, which is love and justice, is absolutely a matter of ego. A proclamation that love and justice don’t matter, and “I can do whatever I want!” Those are the rebels who have written and fight to uphold our unjust laws and cultural expectations. It is these rebels the Psalmist warns against.

So here’s the question: What kind of rebel do I want to be?

Do I consider myself a rebel? In what ways?

*01-05*

“Bless our God, O peoples,

let the sound of his praise be heard,

who has kept us among the living,

and has not let our feet slip.”

— Psalm 66:8-9

It’s not always easy to trust God. Despite having a lot going for me these days, I continue to be plagued by doubts about my future. I have seen God’s action in myriad ways in my life, and God has “not let my feet slip.” And yet I question. Sure, God, you’ve brought me this far and I’m okay, but, you know, I don’t know what’s going to happen in a month, six months, a year. Maybe you could give me some guarantees?

I think it’s just human nature to worry about the things we can’t control (which is pretty much everything). In those moments of worry, we would do well to focus on gratitude for all the ways God has shown up for us in the past, and “Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of our praise be heard!”

How has God taken care of me throughout my life?

*01-06*

“I will pay you my vows,

those that my lips uttered

and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.”

— Psalm 66:13b-14

Making promises to God during a crisis has become a trope. It shows up in movies and TV shows and books. And, of course, the punchline in most cases is that the moment the crisis passes, the person making the promises instantly forgets them and goes about their business as if the crisis never happened.

Here, the psalmist is so overwhelmed with gratitude to God for all that God has done for him, he makes a point of calling out the promises he made during the crisis with a renewed commitment to keep them. Less funny, but definitely earnest.

Of course, I don’t think God saves us from crisis based on the promises we make to God in the moment. God saves because God loves us, end of story. We don’t have to earn it in some way. Crises happen. One way or another, God holds us through them, even if they don’t end up the way we think they should. Sometimes we can be overwhelmed with gratitude for God’s care even when the worst happens. We don’t need to make promises we may or may not keep. We need only lean into the arms of God.

When have I felt sustained by God through a difficult time?

*01-07*

“Come and hear, all you who fear God,

and I will tell what he has done for me.”

— Psalm 66:16

I’m active in a couple of recovery fellowships. If you know anything about 12-Step recovery, you’ll know that a central aspect of them is fellowship in the form of a weekly meeting. Meetings can be wildly different from one another. There are few, if any, rules for most of them. But what they all share is one crucial element: telling stories. We talk about what it was like when we were in active addiction, what happened to change us, and what life is like now, without using. It’s incredibly powerful to hear a wide variety of individual experiences, some quite harrowing, and then hear how God transforms and heals.

In my faith tradition, we don’t do a whole lot of this kind of witnessing, and I think we could really benefit from it as a community. As human beings I think we need to be vulnerable with one another and recognize the way God is actively working in our lives. We need to invite one another to “come and hear, and I will tell what God has done for me!” How awesome would that be!

Am I comfortable talking with others about how God is working in my life?

*01-08*

NO DEVOTION!!

*01-09*

“His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’”

— John 2:5

Main Idea: Sometimes our greatness needs a little push in the right direction.

Mothers want the best for their children. It’s what they do. Mothers also want their children to become productive and successful members of society using their best gifts to make the world a better place. In this text, we learn Mary was no exception.

Jesus had barely gathered followers when an opportunity to show his greatness found him. The wine ran out at a wedding—a terrible faux pas then and now. What an embarrassment it would have been for the wedding families to send the guests home unsatisfied! In a culture where shame was tangibly painful, Mary knew that Jesus had it within him to save them from such shame.

But Jesus resisted. Was it because he didn’t feel ready? Was it because God hadn’t yet given him the green light? We don’t know why, but clearly it wasn’t abhorrent for him to perform such a miracle or he certainly would have refused. But this exchange between Jesus and Mary is light and whimsical. Mary asks him to help. He refuses. Mary ignores his refusal and makes it impossible for him to say no.

Reluctantly, Jesus obliges, and the wedding is saved. His first miracle is done, and his ministry is officially underway. We will never know how long it might have taken Jesus to begin his ministry if not for Mary’s nudge, and we will never know what his first miracle might have been. Maybe this is how it was always supposed to happen. Nobody, including Jesus, lives and works in total isolation. All of us need to be surrounded by the people that push us, challenge us, support us, and love us no matter what. Sometimes our greatness needs a little push in the right direction from the people that know us better than we know ourselves.

*01-10*

NO DEVOTION!!

*01-11*

“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.”

— Psalm 104:1-2a

I love the imagery of clothing in this psalm. God is clothed in light, God clothes the earth with a garment of sea. Personally, I connect with this imagery because I make a lot of my own clothes. There’s something about the creative act of putting together things that I will wear on my body, things that express who I am. It has always felt spiritual to me and now, reading this psalm, maybe I understand why.

God clothes all of creation with beauty, ourselves included. Not in the outer garments we put on, but in our very bodies. Sometimes it can be hard to recognize our inherent beauty when we are daily bombarded with marketing images telling us what we “should” look like. These images are false and damaging. Let us remember that we are all “fearfully and wonderfully made,” an expression of who God is.

Do I believe I am beautiful as I am? How do I express my God-given beauty?

*01-12*

“You make springs gush forth in the valleys;

they flow between the hills,

giving drink to every wild animal.”

— Psalm 104:10-11a

Water is life. About 71% of the earth is covered with it. Up to 60% of the human body is made up of it. A person can’t last more than 3 days without it. Truly, it is a gift from God. And not just to us, but to “every wild animal.” God cares deeply for all of God’s creation, and water is a critical part of it.

Yet the world over, water is in jeopardy. There are millions of tons of plastic in the ocean, killing wildlife. Almost 900 million people don’t have access to clean water. Industries all over the globe pump all kinds of poison waste into rivers and other water sources. Even in the U.S., where most of us take our water for granted, there are half a million people without complete plumbing and a growing infrastructure crisis in public water systems nationwide.

God has made springs gush forth in the valleys to give drink to all of creation. In love and gratitude, we are called to reclaim, protect, and preserve that water on behalf of the world.

Have I reflected on my water use lately? Are there things I can be doing to help with the water crisis?

*01-13*

“O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all;

the earth is full of your creatures.”

— Psalm 104:24

God’s creatures are awe-inspiring. Sure, maybe we’re desensitized to squirrels and pigeons—or whatever local fauna surrounds your locale—so much as to make them seem commonplace. But even these creatures are amazing if you stop to look at them. And then when you see something rare, like the time I witnessed a huge bull moose crashing through the forest in northern Minnesota, it takes your breath away (though a little of that might have been terror).

In God’s wisdom, God created incredible diversity, and all God’s creatures live in delicate balance with one another in myriad ecosystems. Then, of course, we humans blunder ham-handedly into these ecosystems without any thought and the next thing you know, species go extinct. Yes, there is much work to be done there. But at the same time, I encourage you to stop and really take in the beauty of the animals all around you, from the curve of your cat’s tail around his feet to the sleek lines of the hawk on the freeway light post, to the delicate claws on a squirrel’s front feet as she nibbles an acorn. And as you do, bask in the knowledge of the wisdom of God.

What amazes me most about the animals God has created?

*01-14*

“When you send forth your spirit, they are created;

and you renew the face of the ground.”

— Psalm 104:30

Creation is an ongoing process. It’s easy to think of the world having been created in one fell swoop (even if it was over millions of years) and that it’s basically done. But God continues to create the world new every day. Death and birth are constant. Fields lie dormant and then produce again. Species’ genes mutate and something new comes to be. And every morning, the sun comes up again, bathing the world in warmth and light, proclaiming God’s faithfulness. We, too, are made new each day, called into God’s love, nurtured in the spirit, and sent out to be Christ’s healing presence for all we encounter.

What does it mean to me that I am, each day, a new creation?

*01-15*

“I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praise to my God while I have being.”

— Psalm 104:33

How can we keep from singing? When we consider, as the psalmist has, all that God has made and all that God has provided, how can we hold back our gratitude? Of course, we actually need to stop and consider these things for gratitude to happen. When I find myself out of sorts, irritated with people and situations, and resentful about things I can’t control, it’s usually because I haven’t stopped and connected with God and acknowledged all that I am and all that I have. When I do take time to do that, my entire perspective shifts. Things that really bugged me suddenly seem insignificant. If my heart and mind are full of gratitude, there isn’t room for petty irritations. And then, of course, I sing. Because I love to sing. But even if you’re not a singer in the strictest sense, your whole being can be a song of thanksgiving to God.

How do I express my gratitude for all that God has done for me?

*01-16*

“He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a market-place!’”

— John 2:16

Main Idea: Although Jesus’ temple cleansing might seem frightening and alarming, it was a passionate and loving act of forgiveness and freedom.

The placement of this cleansing story in John is one of many characteristics that sets John apart from the other three gospels. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this story happens near the end of Jesus’ ministry—his teachings and miracles all building up to a fiery climax. But in John, his fit of anger as he overturns the temple marketplace is the first public thing he does. He wastes no time setting straight the people God has chosen as God’s own. John’s Jesus is neither passive nor gentle. He comes with fire and passion right out of the gate.

Israel had a long history of sliding away from God’s will, and then suffering the consequences of their actions by exile or occupation. By Jesus’ day they were occupied by Rome. Truthfully, all of humanity has had a long history of turning laws and rules that were once good and healthy for all people into policies of enslavement, control, or oppression. By the time of the Reformation, the Christian church had done the same—they had twisted God’s laws into terrible devices of torture and oppression. Over and over again humanity takes what is pure and good and turns it into something ugly and disgusting.

But time and time again God turns what people have destroyed into something wonderful and beautiful. Jesus’ destruction of the marketplace on the surface might seem corrosive, but it was in fact a movement toward freeing the oppressed and poor. They would no longer need to spend what little they had to appease a seemingly angry God. Jesus helped them (and us) to see that God is a loving, forgiving, passionate, and zealous God who needs no more than our love and loyalty.

*01-17*

“Unless the Lord builds the house,

those who build it labor in vain.”

— Psalm 127:1a

I recently moved into a new place and I love it. Aside from the utilities-inclusive rent, heated parking spot, and free maintenance on everything in my home (those folks are my heroes!) it’s the first time that I have ever had what is truly my own space. From the outset, I wanted to make sure it was a place of peace and comfort, and filled with expressions of my love for my family and the world. I commissioned my (extremely talented) niece to paint a canvas for the front entryway welcoming all people, no matter what. I crafted picture frames using stones and beach glass found at my family’s cabin in Michigan. I crafted other picture frames using tree bark and moss to evoke the forest, which I love. I have a home which is simple, free of clutter, and truly a place I want to be.

But my efforts to create a home are all secondary to those of God, who is most responsible for “building the house.” It was God who walked with me through the challenges of my divorce. God who provided work with which to support myself. God who led me to the physical space I now call home. In these and innumerable other ways, God has built and continues to build my “house.”

How do I see my life as having been built by God?

*01-18*

“Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord,

the fruit of the womb a reward.”

— Psalm 127:3

Oh, the patriarchy! Sigh. When this was written, property belonged to men and was passed down through men. Having sons wasn’t just nice, it was an imperative. So much so that a woman’s entire value was based on her ability to produce male offspring. And if you had sons to carry on your family name? Well, that was everything. After all, God’s first promise to Abram was descendants too numerous to be counted, via a son of his old age.

If we can strip away the patriarchy, is there a word of blessing to be found for us in this text? You bet. Children are awesome. And not because of what they do for you (carrying on the family name or some other idea of immortality via genetics). Children are awesome because of what we are called to do for them. Our God is a mothering God, caring and nurturing all of creation to its flourishing. If we choose to have children or work with children, we are called into this same selfless parenting which can teach us so much about compassion, patience, and service. In turn, those qualities can affect the way we respond to others, and actually make us more loving people. And that is its own reward.

How have my interactions with the children in my life changed me?

*01-19*

“Happy is everyone who fears the Lord,

who walks in his ways.

You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;

you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.”

— Psalm 128:1-2

Sadly, this isn’t always the case. Plenty of people who love God do not eat the fruit of the labor of their hands, generally because social and economic systems keep them impoverished and dependent. Poverty doesn’t preclude happiness, but it makes it much harder to come by. This isn’t necessarily to make you feel guilty for whatever abundance you enjoy, but to keep you mindful of the needs of others.

We are called to be in awe of God and to walk in God’s ways. That means, in part, that we take action on behalf of those who are poor and oppressed. And we find, when we are committed to that work, we do experience happiness. When we lift others, we, ourselves, are lifted.

What does it mean to me to walk in God’s ways? How has it led to happiness?

*01-20*

“Your wife will be like a fruitful vine

within your house;

your children will be like olive shoots

around your table.

Thus shall the man be blessed

who fears the Lord.”

— Psalm 128:3-4

More patriarchy. Sigh. I’d like to rewrite this. Just because I can.

Your spouse will be a true partner to yoy

 in every way;

Should you choose to have children,

you will work together in harmony

 to nurture your children for their flourishing.

Thus shall every person be blessed

 who heeds God’s call to live for one another in love.

What does a faithful and happy home look like to me?

*01-21*

“The Lord bless you from Zion.

May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem

all the days of your life.

May you see your children’s children.

Peace be upon Israel!”

— Psalm 128:5-6

There’s a better than good chance that I will never have grandchildren. I don’t know, yet, how I feel about that. I know how much joy my kids and my siblings’ kids have brought to my parents. And I remember well how much my own grandparents delighted in me.

For the ancient Israelites, God’s promise was offspring, family, nation. Children, grandchildren, and descendants were proof of God’s love, an assurance that their names would continue on. For us in modern times, a lot of these ideas still linger. After all, who will remember me if I have no descendants feverishly researching on Ancestry.com?

I take comfort in the fact that I am a member of God’s family, a beloved child and essential part of the Body of Christ. I recognize the myriad ways God has blessed me and my family, and I am sure that whether or not I am remembered a hundred years from now on earth, I will always be fully known and deeply loved by God. And that’ enough for me.

What do I think about genealogy? What does it mean to me to be part of God’s family?

*01-22*

“Often have they attacked me from my youth,

yet they have not prevailed against me.”

— Psalm 129:2

Israel was used to being attacked. It was just par for the course in their history. But in spite of being conquered by any number of nations large and small, the people of Israel maintained their national identity. They were God’s people, and they trusted that ultimately, God would deliver.

All of us face challenges in our lives. Maybe not from other people literally attacking or oppressing us, but from any number of misfortunes or difficult relationships or precarious situations. For me, it has been so important to stay close to God through these times, to remember that I am not alone in my suffering. And, like Israel, I have been grateful to declare that thus far my challenges have not prevailed against me. Thanks be to God.

How does God show up in my life when I am dealing with difficulties?

*01-23*

“Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”

— John 3:9-10

Main Idea: We are an intricate blend of flesh (shame) and spirit (healing)—our spirits can be strengthened when we bring our shame to light for forgiveness and healing.

There is a refreshing vulnerability in Jesus’ exchange with Nicodemus. Nicodemus approached Jesus, not to accuse him, but to learn from him. He came at night so he might not be seen by those opposed to Jesus’ message. Then he asked human questions of a divine Lord. Of course, he would not be able to fully comprehend Jesus’ words (nor can we). But Jesus responded to the tenderness and willingness Nicodemus showed by speaking a complicated truth as innocently as possible. It was probably a little like trying to explain death to a child—even if we could understand it ourselves, it would be quite a task trying to explain it to an undeveloped mind.

Despite the mysteries in Jesus’ words, there are some truths we can grasp onto. We can cling to the promise that a spiritual life is possible. Jesus spoke cryptically about the flesh and the spirit, but we can sense that a spiritual life contains more hope than a flesh-seeking life. The things of the flesh are those things that we spend tremendous energy hiding in the dark—those things we hope no one will ever know, those things we try so hard to ignore or forget. But the things of the spirit thrive in the light—the things we are proud of, the things we want Jesus to see and to say, “I’m proud of you, too.”

We all have an intricate blending of both the things of the flesh and the things of the spirit. Ironically, the things of darkness hold less power over us when we bring them to light. Those things that cause us the most shame fester in the darkness, but heal in the light. When we muster the courage to risk sharing those things, the outcome is often forgiveness and healing, and our spirits are strengthened and nurtured.

*01-24*

“He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

— John 3:29-30

John the Baptist was ceding his authority to Jesus. John, a well-known prophet, had made a name for himself baptizing in the Jordan, to the point where many wondered if he might be the messiah. When Jesus’ popularity began to eclipse John’s, some questioned whether he wasn’t a little put out. John knew the score. He knew he had only been the opening act, and that Jesus was the main event. And he was thrilled that Jesus’ ministry was catching on—after all, John had been the one to point people to Jesus in the first place.

Growing up, I always loved being the center of attention. I sang, I acted, I made art, I played flute, I spoke publicly. With such showy talents, I was noticed and praised. As an adult, it became more important to me to encourage others, to be collaborative, and to work in less obvious ways. I’ve always worked with kids in one way or another, and I love when they are able to step out of their comfort zones and enjoy the spotlight in one way or another.

Sure, I still enjoy attention. I’m human after all. But I am grateful to recognize that I’m just the opening act, and it’s fun to let the people I work with be the main event.

Where have I felt called to step back and let others shine?

*01-25*

“He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.”

— John 3:34

Jesus gives the Spirit without measure. Ooh, I do so love that. John baptized with water, but something different happened when Jesus got involved. Something different always happens when Jesus gets involved. The waters of baptism become more than water. The Holy Spirit is poured out for all of us, leading, inspiring, teaching, exhorting, empowering. John made it clear that Jesus was no ordinary prophet or teacher, but the one God sent, who speaks God’s word and gives us the Spirit.

Jesus works in and through all of us now. So doesn’t that mean that we are to speak God’s words of love and justice, and share the Holy Spirit with the world? Not as if we, ourselves, were Jesus, of course. But in all humility, and pointing to the one who is the true source, we too can lead, inspire, teach, exhort and empower through the Holy Spirit. How cool is that?

What does it mean to me that Jesus “gives the Spirit without measure?” What does that look like in my life?

*01-26*

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me.”

— Psalm 139:1

Growing up I felt different. Other. I didn’t understand my peers. I was socially awkward. I had a couple close friends (for whom I am eternally grateful) but even they didn’t really “get” me. It took a long time for me to come into my own and embrace the things that make me unique. Part of that process involved coming to believe that God knew and loved me completely for exactly who I was. I had been told that in my church upbringing, and intellectually I thought I believed it. But when I got to a place where I actually internalized it, it was a total revelation. What a difference in makes to my outlook on life when I know that God has “searched me and known me” and adores me no matter what.

Have I overcome feelings of being different? How has God helped me to love myself?

*01-27*

“Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?”

— Psalm 139:7

There was a time in my life when I felt abandoned by God. The summer of 2004 was awful—if it could go wrong, it did. I was in a lot of pain and so were people around me. In my grief, I turned to food in order to numb the feelings I couldn’t seem to handle, and developed a full-blown addiction.

When I got into recovery, I realized it wasn’t God who had abandoned me. I was the one who had abandoned God. I was trying to control the uncontrollable circumstances of my life, and hurting myself and others in the process. I was acting as though there was no God, or at the very least, God was occupied with more important things.

Throughout all of it, God was there. Even though I had turned my back on God, I was never away from God’s presence. As the psalmist asks, where could I have gone from God’s spirit? Where could I have fled from God’s presence? No matter how I tried to cut myself off, God still held me until I was ready to come to my senses. I am so grateful to have a God who never gives up on me.

When have I tried to flee from God’s presence? What was the result?

*01-28*

“For it was you who formed my inward parts;

you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

— Psalm 139:13-14a

I remember holding my infant daughter in wonder. Those tiny fingers and toes, those chubby cheeks, that full head of dark hair. For months I had been waiting, with no idea of what she would be like (or even that she was a “she”). Then at long last, there she was in my arms, ten pounds of amazing—a total miracle. I had to praise God, for she was fearfully and wonderfully made, indeed! As am I. As are you. Each of us is completely known by God and knit together in love.

How does it feel to know I am fully known by God?

*01-29*

“Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

I hate them with perfect hatred;

I count them my enemies.”

— Psalm 139:21-22

Yikes. This is what is so so so so so wrong with some folks who claim to be Christians. Folks who insist that anyone who doesn’t believe exactly to the letter what they believe about God is entirely deluded or even evil and ought to be condemned or worse. God doesn’t hate so why would God want us to hate?

The instinct to speak and act violently toward those who disagree with us arises from fear, and it’s something we need work against every day. If we are confident that God, in infinite love, is in charge of all things, then we wouldn’t feel the need to wrest control from God and take matters into our own hands.

Bottom line: God does not hate. Neither should I.

Do I find myself disliking or even hating those who disagree with me? How can I seek forgiveness for this?

*01-30*

“The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’”

— John 4:25-26

Main Idea: Jesus’ invitation to drink the water of eternal life is for all people.

This entire exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman should never have happened. Jews did not mingle with Samaritans. Men did not have private conversations with women. And yet, here it is—the beginning of the breaking down of barriers that Jesus fought for and continues to fight for today. Jesus did not see Samaritan or female—Jesus saw a child of God every bit as deserving of his time and attention as any other.

Like last week’s encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus once again spoke cryptically about the things of the flesh and the things of the spirit. This time he explained the spirit as water with the power to bring eternal life—water that will make its drinkers never thirst again.

The woman asked Jesus for this water that refreshes the spirit and Jesus gave it to her. By asking about her husband, he gave her a choice. She could either answer truthfully, that she had not one husband but several—a shameful thing—or answer deceptively, thereby keeping her secret and her shame hidden in darkness. She chose to open the door to reveal her shame, and Jesus swung it wide open with his prophetic sight, “You have had five husbands, and the one you have now it not your husband.” Would she shut down with the sudden revelation of her shame, or would she accept the vulnerability and claim Jesus’ forgiveness as her own? She chose to remain open and in the end, Jesus’ identity as Messiah, Christ, was revealed to her before any other. Because of her openness and willingness to live in the light, many others were exposed to Jesus that day and many chose to believe.

*01-31*

“My tears have been my food

day and night,

while people say to me continually,

‘Where is your God?’”

— Psalm 42:3

Sometimes it’s really hard not to be cynical. I just have to look around at the state of the environment, the climate, the political landscape in my country and around the world, and the injustice woven into the very fabric of modern society to be the one asking, “Where is my God?” The psalmist’s soul longs for God as a deer longs for flowing streams. Honestly? So does mine. Going down the existential rabbit hole only leads to despair and paralysis, and that benefits no one. I crave the healing and assurance of the Spirit, so that I might have the strength to answer God’s call to action.

It’s okay to be concerned with the state of the world. It’s okay to cry about it. And it’s okay to slump into the arms of God and be held in our fear and misery. Where is our God? Holding us and the world. And when we’re ready, we can get back up and move forward, trusting that God has our back while we stick out our necks.

How do I care for myself when I am sad and scared about what I see happening around me?