

FIELD

NOTES

on the observance of

Lent



AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

About Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

- Austin Seminary students are committed to the church. Each student gains valuable experience in ministry—preaching, leading worship, teaching, offering pastoral care, and practicing church administration—through working with an experienced pastor and mentor. An overwhelming majority of students answer calls in pastoral ministry and our alumni serve in ministry settings in nearly every state and across the globe. Our faculty are faithful Christians who preach, teach, and serve congregations.
- Annual tuition for the master's-level degree is approximately \$13,800. We provide need-based financial aid for approximately 75% of our students, paying up to 85% of their tuition cost.
- Funds from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) support less than .01% of the total Seminary budget. Most operating costs are met through gifts from individuals and churches and from endowment income.

Our students rely upon the financial support of donors who are committed to the future of the church. Please support them with your prayers and financial contributions.

Introduction

In the Church Year, there are two seasons of preparation: Advent, leading up to Christmas, and Lent, leading up to Easter. As such, each has a dual aspect: repentance and hope.

— Repentance and hope are distinguishable but inseparable. Repentance without hope is masochistic. Hope without repentance is a sham. Each must accompany the other if Lent is truly to prepare us for the coming of Easter.

— Lent is customarily associated with fasting, in commemoration of Jesus's forty days in the wilderness in preparation for his earthly ministry. In the early church, the practice of lenten fasting was common, although the details varied considerably (which is still the case) and were sometimes controversial. Gradually, over several centuries, Lent came to consist of forty days following Ash Wednesday, during which people practiced moderate fasting; plus six Sundays. Since Sundays celebrated the Resurrection, the fast was relaxed.

— Reformed Christians initially rejected the observance of Lent as having an insufficient biblical base. Much of this rejection was fueled by suspicion of Roman Catholicism. Now, however, Lent is included in the Church Year in most Reformed denominations, and is accepted without reservation, although, again, the practices associated with Lent vary. Since there are no formal guidelines as to how Lent is to be observed, people have considerable freedom in creating and adopting practices that are meaningful in their own contexts.

— Still, there are constants. The work of Lent has an inner and an outer aspect. The inner work of Lent focuses on the renewal of the relationship of one's soul to God. Practices such as Scripture reading, examination of conscience, and regular prayer constitute the inner work of Lent. The goal of such practices is obedience to the Great Commandment: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5, NRSV).

The outer work of Lent is concerned with one's relationship with others. Seeking—or offering—forgiveness, volunteer work or community service, financial support of worthy activities, or simply being kinder day by day are practices of the outer work. The goal of all this is obedience to the commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (cf. Leviticus 19:18 NRSV).

Practices such as fasting bridge the inner and outer work of Lent. Fasting has many forms. It can be literal, in giving up certain foods, refraining from eating at all for a time, or simply eating less. Fasting can also be figurative, as in giving up some possession or activity that one normally does. The point here is to remember God when we experience hunger or the loss of something we normally have. But some of the early church authors insisted that people should give the food they do not eat or the possessions they do not use to the poor. Fasting without giving, they said, was pointless.

The work of Lent, inner and outer, does not have to be heroic. But it should be significant. It should make us more aware of our need to repent, and more able to lodge our hope in the grace of God. Mother Teresa of Calcutta is said to have said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” Whether she actually said this or not is a matter of some dispute, but it is a summation of the “Little Way” of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. These words, or some approximation of them, are now showing up on plaques, bumper stickers, and tattoos. Who first said them is irrelevant. They can guide us through Lent and beyond. Doing small things with great love is a fair summary of what the Christian life could and should be, provided we remember that anything done with great love is not small in the eyes of God.

– David Johnson



Associate Professor of
Church History and Christian Spirituality

1. *Cultivating silence*

“By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.” – Psalm 42.8

“Elected silence, sing to me ... and be the music that I care to hear.”
– Gerard Manley Hopkins

I’m writing these words from the Peter Albertino guest room at New Camaldoli Hermitage, in the Big Sur of California. I’m on the last day of a six-day silent, solo retreat. After a few days here, it sometimes feels as if the hermitage sits on the edge of the universe, perched as it is, one thousand feet up the coastal hillside overlooking the overwhelmingly majestic Pacific Ocean.

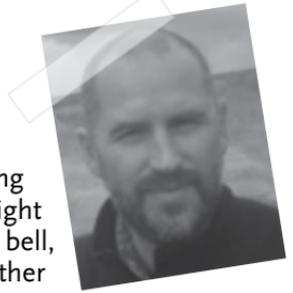
I know the sea is there. I can hear it. But I can’t see it. All week, the sea has been hidden by waves of mist and dense fog, lingering like breath over the cedars. When the clouds do part momentarily, it is as if they are the eyelid, revealing the glassy eye of God. A sea of consciousness that seems to see me as I see it. And we stare at each other; with each other, until I seem to disappear in the seeing.

The towering redwoods flourish in the nearby hidden valleys, blanketed by such moisture-rich fog that now veils my view. The mist makes the silence more mysterious. In the fog, I can’t tell the difference between the silence of the evergreen forest and the silence of my hermitage room.

In the dark early mornings, and in the dusky hours of early night, I have lit a cedar-scented candle. That, along with my hot coffee and room heater, has been my chief creature comfort. And I have cherished the meditation time following the vespers service in the sanctuary. The monks light the Eucharistic table candles, ring the meditation bell, and we sink into the silence sitting nearby each other in the milled redwood paneled chapel.

The silence is deep. Sometimes the wooden beams of the redwood ceiling creak in the wind. Otherwise, it is a chamber for the making of the song of silence together. The silent song resonates with decade’s worth of prayerful intentions; echoes from the countless souls who have journeyed to this hillside hermitage to disappear into the song of God and become a note lingering in the silence.

In this chamber, the silence seems to hear itself. It sings a song we can all share in. From time to time, its wordless joy bubbles up in me, and I notice gentle tears streaming down my face. I have no idea



why I am crying—it is as if my body is releasing both pain and joy, gratitude and grief. The ancients called it the gift of tears. *Penthos*. Compunction. And it is a gift—a grace that arrives softly like the mountain rain.

Just now, I heard the sanctuary bell calling us to morning Eucharist. I will head out into the fog and listen for the song-chant to find my way there. The song has been sung in every age in diverse ways.

Song. Note. Salt. Seed. Water. Mist. These things act by disappearing and dissolving. A Native American Ute song deeply speaks of this remembrance, interconnectivity, and release in the song of silence—our common breathing, praying, and being. Like monastics around the world, the Ute people sing in chant form, too. Listen closely to their song, and you will hear enduring wisdom:

“In our bones is the rock itself;
in our blood is the river;
our skin contains the shadow
of every living thing we ever came across.
This is what we brought with us long ago.”

We have brought with us the ache for silence. And it brings us back to our Source. Our shared song in the silence, as the people of God gathered in churches and fields and living rooms and storefronts all around the planet, is perhaps our last best chance of letting go of all the words that have wounded and barricaded each other out, limiting love in the midst of our fearful grasping to gain or defend.

The song of silence binds us to the void with a quiet joy. But that void is not empty—it overflows with humble, self-giving, other-centered love, drawing us into a deeper relationality; a living choir of notes spun into being from within God’s eternal song.

All the more, may the song of silence work its grace, dissolving us into the chorus of love—a song that came here embodied with us long ago in the universe of God’s eye, whose blink encompasses eternity and whose tears shine down upon the hills and forests and mountain lakes, still quickening young women and men to buckle and bow with wonder at the gift of letting go of all that has been, so to discover all that yet might be in the still silences of surrender.

Amen.

– Peter Traben Haas (DMin’11)

2. Financial fasting

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!” – Psalm 118:1

As is the case with many families these days ... our lives are busy. In my life, we have two working parents with two teenage daughters which means we are going in many different directions and have lots of distractions. Finding a realistic Lenten practice or spiritual discipline is difficult.



Of course, I think that is the point of Lenten disciplines: they are difficult. Difficult so that we can reflect on Christ's sacrifice and find ourselves leaning more on God's guidance and help. Our hope is that by Easter we have come to trust in God even more. As the psalmist states “give thanks to the Lord, his love endures forever!”

I think one of the most meaningful Lenten practices that our family adopted was giving up spending money on unnecessary items. We spent necessary monies—paid bills, bought groceries, etc.—but we didn't go out to eat, didn't stop at the dollar bins at Target, didn't go to the movies or other activities that required spending money (unless we had a gift card). At first it was a challenge, we had to rethink our meals and our entertainment. We had to be more organized and have a plan. But not spending money did not change what mattered most and we realized how distracted we can become from simply being with one another because of the constant “going” and “doing.” This Lenten practice enabled us to spend more time together—playing games, taking walks with the dogs, baking cookies, working together to repurpose something old to use it in a new way. Just enjoying our time together.

This is the kind of practice that helped us to focus on what mattered: the life that God has given us, the gift of each day and the gift of time with one another, how much we have to be thankful for.

Lent is a wonderful time to focus on our relationship with Christ and in turn focus on our relationships with other people. Each of which is a gift from our loving and faithful God! Life is full of ups and downs, feast and famine. Lenten practices allow us to focus on that and to promise that we, too, will hold fast to the faith and promise that is ours.

– Denise Odom (MDiv'99)

3. Fasting from the news



Fasting and journaling are joined together in my spiritual practices. Fasting may seem an odd choice for consistent practice, but for me fasting leads into journaling my reflections on the spiritual life.

Now I know that fasting carries many different meanings today: fasting for blood tests, fasting for losing weight, or fasting from an addictive practice. But fasting in the Christian tradition is removing obstacles that take away our attention from God and that become idols of our own making. Like Marjorie Thompson says in her seminal work on spiritual formation, *Soul Feast*, we “fast so that we can feast on God.”

So Lent becomes a time for intentional fasting. Personally I fast from the daily news so that I can devote my time to study, reflection, prayer, and journaling my spiritual journey. Generally I fast from the news until the 5:00pm news hour and read my newspaper or my e-news in the evening. This practice prepares my heart and mind to see the world with the eyes of faith, to know God will use all things for His purposes. It keeps me from becoming embroiled in the anxiety of the day.

Now you may be asking: How is that a specific practice for Lent? And how does that practice lead into my worship? First, fasting leads me into the deeper recesses of my relationship with God since God needs silence and intentionality to speak and to move within my heart. Second, fasting prepares me to know that by doing without a thing that I want, I can open a way for God to transform and reform me into His image. And last, fasting becomes a way of life, not just for certain times of the year.

For Lent, I bring more intentionality to my spiritual practice. In the past, I have fasted so that I can walk with Jesus during Lent and Holy Week leading into Easter. This year, I will do this again so that Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Saturday, and Easter bring me into the upper room, to the hill of Golgotha, in the tomb on Saturday, and to the resurrection on Easter Sunday. I will journal the journey as one of the women disciples accompanying Jesus.

I will reflect on these questions: What does it mean to walk with Jesus all the way? Where is God in all this, especially at the cross with Jesus’s cry of dereliction?

– Suzanne Isaacs (MDiv’10)

4. Lent in community

Last year, two months into my new role as pastor, I discovered, as Lent arrived, how truly wonderful our church family is. During Sunday announcements, our liturgist reminded everyone that the worship committee was meeting after our service and that this committee included anyone in the church who wanted to be on it. Around our planning table, at least half the people in church that day were ready to sort through possibilities for our Lenten practice. Listening to the many creative ways our community had approached Lent over the years, I was thankful not just for what I was hearing, but also that we were all so vigorously talking about what might provide the most meaningful experience. I felt honored to be part of this. It seemed to me that wandering in the wilderness for forty days would be just fine because we were all walking along together.

We ate pancakes on Fat Tuesday, then started Lent after dinner with an Ash Wednesday service a little early. Honestly, this felt odd to me. Maybe because of the syrup not too far away. Nevertheless, we entered into Lent in earnest. During Lent, we spent our Sundays focusing on Jesus's words from the cross. And by the time we left behind the palms and Palm Sunday, we were ready to have a Passover Seder. Because I was raised as a Jew, leading this Seder brought back tender memories. And everyone present enjoyed the Maccabeats version of "Dayenu." We placed butterflies on a wooden cross, hunted Easter eggs, shared lots of candy, and celebrated together a powerful Easter morning. Our journey through Lent helped me join up; I became a member of our dear church family.



This year, we are planning an Ash Wednesday service on Wednesday (we're going to eat pancakes later, at breakfast before our Easter service). The first Sunday of Lent, we are having a hymn-sing and letting go service around a campfire at a beautiful

farm. Maundy Thursday, we'll wash feet, celebrate the Lord's Supper, and eat dinner together. Stations of the cross will be available to walk in our sanctuary on Friday afternoon. And then (hooray!) Easter! I trust each Lenten event we share will bring us close at the same time we will find in them what we individually need. What a blessing it is to travel through Lent as part of a community.

- Kris Brown (MDiv'16)

5. Holy One, Holy other

The churches I have served have offered a variety of Lenten practices. Some have been traditional and meaningful, begun several years ago, but sometimes they are lacking an enlivening connection with the season.

One informal and personal practice I have begun is to engage in my prayers with a new style. This year I have chosen to pray with a seldom used name for God, “the Holy One in our midst.” I usually pray “Good and gracious God ...” I do not recall how I stumbled upon the phrase, “Holy One in our Midst,” but I found this “name” enticing. I discovered it in Hosea 11, where God’s incomprehensible love is shown to God’s fallible and shameful people. It invites me to experience a new and inviting focus, one that opens me to “know” God who is not made “in our image.” I am learning to expand my sense of who the divine is to me. This is to be an honest, learning, faith-enhancing practice.

Along with my prayer with “the Holy One in our midst,” I am widening my understanding and my experience with the “new commandment,” that you love one another “as I have loved you.” Could this mean we are to love with reckless abandon? Jesus’s commandment continues to be a strong and striking admonition for Christians to strengthen their understanding of God and widen our love for others.

As crucial as this prayer is to us all, I have stumbled again onto a different recipient of love: “the other.” Jesus offered his commandment in the context of believers, upholding friends and cementing their lives to our Lord. My Lenten prayer this year is to pray for “the other” as I observe them in the store, on the street, at school, or in groups, including families who are usually not people I know. Could this include those who appear on social media and TV and those in powerful leadership positions?

Ignorant of those who need special prayer, I usually choose one who appears to be disconnected or unhappily separated from others. Prayer for those with whom I am close continues to be important to me, but praying for “the other,” any other, maybe especially when “the other” does not look or sound like me, engages me to expand and deepen my prayer to claim one with whom I can be welcoming as “neighbor.”

I intend that my growth and learning will be authentic as I move through this Lenten practice. I will continue to value references to God as Lord, Almighty God, Eternal God, Merciful God, Sovereign God, Creator God, and others.

– David Fletcher (MDiv’69)



6. Letters of hope

If you told me that the majority of my ministry at the moment would be fielding questions about hell, I would have said, No way. I was wrong. It is the most asked, most talked about topic of my ministry.

I am asked, what happens after we die? Is there a literal hell that I can be banished to?

Others want to know if hell exists on earth because it feels like they are already being punished before they ever die. Some have a cancer diagnosis with no healing in sight, others have chaos moment after chaos moment. Then there are a few who are just curious about it because someone else asked the question.

I can't answer the hell question in 400 words, but what I believe and understand the Bible to say about hell is that it is any separation from God. The feeling, maybe even belief, that the God who formed you and knows you has left you to your own misery. I cannot believe the God who forms us and knows us, who sent his Son to this world not to condemn it but so that we may have life, leaves us to our own misery, alone.

This led to a practice last Lent that I will do again this year. I took a piece of paper and wrote down forty names of people from whom I felt disconnected or estranged, hurt by or whom I hurt, those whom I disliked for various reasons, and so on. I hand wrote them a letter on the day their name appeared on the list. The letter began as a way to reconnect. Sometimes I apologized in that letter for the hurt I caused or apologized that it had been far too long since I had connected with them.

Some wrote back to me. Others wanted to get together for lunch. Some flew across the country to meet. The most memorable one was from a 97-year-old home church member. I had not talked to her in over ten years. I included a picture to help jog her memory.

She wrote back in handwriting that was barely legible but it was hers. "My dearest Lisa, I will never forget the first time I took you from your parent's home for VBS. I knew you were special then. It means the world to me as I face my own death that you thought of me. I still thank God for you and our paths crossing. I am proud of you today as I was so many years ago. My love."

Forty names and forty opportunities to make hell on earth seem less so. It truly is connection that is asked of us in Lent. Connection to Jesus Christ and to each other. Then it doesn't matter if hell is real or right in front of us. We can conquer all that faces us.

Who will be on your list of forty names?



7. Labyrinthine journey

In December 2016 an alumnus gave a canvas labyrinth to Austin College. The labyrinth is large enough to cover the floor of the Small Chapel where we hold weekly Communion services during the semester, and it has become a valuable resource in the religious life of our campus. The labyrinth is unrolled and made available to the campus community at certain times during each week. As we considered additional ways to incorporate the labyrinth into the religious life of our campus, the students who worked with me to develop our Sunday night Eucharistic services suggested that we leave the labyrinth out during Lent and that all of our Sunday night worship services involve individual worshipers walking the Labyrinth as they participated in each service.

After introductory remarks from the chaplain about the nature of the Lenten journey, the first student enters the labyrinth, stops at the first turn, and reads a piece of the liturgy. That student then moves to the second turn in the labyrinth and another student enters, stops at the first turn, and reads the next portion of the service. The service proceeds in this way until each worshiper has entered the labyrinth and read part of the liturgy. The service continues as each student proceeds through the labyrinth, stopping when they reach the center. After all worshipers have reached the center of the labyrinth, the Eucharist is celebrated there. After Communion, the service continues as participants proceed out of the labyrinth in the same way they entered.

Incorporating the labyrinth into these Lenten services enables students to focus on their own particular journeys through Lent and the labyrinth while also remaining immediately aware of the presence of others as we make our way together to share the Sacrament and then return together to serve the world.

– John Williams (MDiv'87)



8. *Going into the dark places*

Certain experiences in my life have demanded I practice the discipline of confession, but in general, I have largely neglected it, choosing instead to focus on the positive. Then a few years ago a colleague in healing ministry taught me the powerful practice of seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance to uncover what needs to be brought into the light so that we might more effectively seek the inner healing of the one with whom we are ministering. I immediately recognized the benefit of this practice in my own prayer life. As I grow bolder in seeking God's truth about the roots of my sin/pain/fear/etc ... my life is being radically transformed!



When I ask God to show me what needs to be brought into my awareness—to remove the barriers inhibiting me from opening entirely to God's transformative love—I am frequently astounded by the revelations God calls to mind. In the midst of this practice recently, I suddenly remembered being a lonely, frustrated four-year old, placed before the TV with a box of cereal by my grandmother who was overwhelmed by the demands of caring for me. I immediately knew that my life-long struggle with emotional eating and restlessness is rooted in experiences of being a neglected little girl. I suddenly realized that God revealed this memory to heal me of the emotional scars, frustrations, and shame that has accompanied me most of my life—just more of the life-giving work God seeks to do in each of us.

Most of us resist going into the darkness of our painful memories and character flaws, but as Teresa of Avila said, "It is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves." The intent of this practice is not to discover how bad we are, but to let the truth set us free (John 8:32) as we open ourselves to the healing available to us.

May your Lenten Season be filled with the faith, trust, and courage to ask God to reveal the darkness that remains, that the light of God's love might shine, illuminating even the hidden places within.

– Valerie Sansing (MDiv'00)

9. Centering prayer

My Lenten disciplines have varied over the years, from giving up something like chocolate, or my fears, which I envisioned handing over to God, to adding in practices such as a daily expression of gratitude. This year, I plan to practice centering prayer twice a day instead of my usual once. I spend much of my time with words—reading, researching, writing, and speaking. When I attended a Renovare Prayer Conference at Mo-Ranch a few years ago I decided a centering prayer workshop on prayer without words would be a good change of pace. The two workshop leaders were both named Brian. One Brian described centering prayer as backstroking in the river of grace. The other said centering prayer was like crawling up into God's lap. That image captured my imagination, as some of my grandchildren were still small enough then to sit in my lap.

Since that centering prayer workshop, I have spent twenty minutes in centering prayer most days. I sit comfortably, rest my hands on my thighs, set a timer for twenty minutes, close my eyes, and picture myself crawling up into God's lap, or God picking me up and placing me there. It can be a challenge to release the thoughts that inevitably crowd in. Instead I focus on the words I've chosen on which to center myself, like grace or mercy, and imagine myself setting my concerns down like boxes as I quiet my mind and heart. I can always retrieve the concerns after the prayer session, if they still seem important. Each prayer session is different. For example, I've learned when I'm angry I can sit down and imagine myself smashing my concerns against a wall. I am grateful that God can handle my anger.

Like most disciplines, centering prayer has become easier with practice. This practice has blessed me immensely as I've learned to focus on God's constant presence in my life. Time spent in God's presence refreshes me like nothing else. When I focus internally on God's presence instead of on the distractions of the outside world, I feel myself embraced by God, and a deep sense of peace invariably washes over me and moves me to say, "Thank you, Lord!"

– Donna Bowling (MDiv'03)



10. *Dancing with the Psalms*

I have given up many different things for Lent—M&M's, beer, soda, one lunch a week; it's like Lent is some kind of spiritual diet. It can be so trivial and self-focused. Yet, I will once again give up something for Lent, and I will encourage others to do so. However, the most crucial part of any kind of fast is not what is given up, but what fills up in replacement. Paul wanted to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his suffering by becoming like him in death (Phil 3:10). I want to be drawn near to Christ and Christ's redemption and salvation, and, grow in the likeness of Christ. I want this for the people I have been called to pastor. I need to turn from looking at what I am doing and giving up to what Christ is doing, giving, and calling.

My wife and I started ballroom dancing as an empty nest activity. We knew very little when we started. With lessons and practice we have grown as dancers. The beat of the music forms and shapes the style of dance. I have found the psalms to function in much the same way. They are great lessons for prayer. The ancient prayer book of the people of God molds and shapes a contemporary journey with Jesus with the beat of God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

I need prayer that is real, honest, and transforming. I need prayer that moves me from self-focus and self-absorption to God-focused and other-focused. I need prayer that is not just about asking, but also about listening and transforming. I need prayer that forms praise and joy even in times of honest lament.

The Christian calendar provides different times for us—ordinary time, Epiphany time, Christmas time, Easter time, Pentecost time and Lent time. Each of these times presents an opportunity to allow prayer to form and shape a dance of faith and faithfulness. Lent is a blessed time for spiritual discipline—prayer, self-giving, fasting. I want to walk with Jesus and with others on the journey to the cross.

For the last several years I have led a Lenten study entitled, "Psalms in Lent Time." Each week I prepare a presentation and lead a discussion on the lectionary psalm for the coming Sunday. The process of preparation, presentation, discussion, and prayer has become that which fills in the space of denial. In community, we are given a beat for the dance of life with Christ.

– Ken Ritchie (MDiv'90)



II. Praying with the hymns

“One who sings prays twice.” – attributed to St. Augustine

I grew up singing. With no car radio when I was a little girl, my parents and I sang on every trip, everything from “Kookaburra” to “Dona Nobis Pacem.”

As a third grader, I sat with the adult choir on Wednesday evenings for practice, and I learned scripture through great anthems while my parents were off doing their holy work. As a teenager, I sang with the First Presbyterian Church Choir in Midland under the direction of C. Allison Salley. Al ran a demanding hour and a half of practice each week and under his direction, we twice produced “Amahl and the Night Visitors” by Menotti. Fauré’s “Requiem” later became music for the funeral for our beloved high school vice principal. We tuned our hearts to Benjamin Britten’s “Ceremony of Carols.” We heralded the coming of Jesus with Handel’s “Messiah.” We ached with the poignancy of Bach’s “St. Matthew Passion,” singing through tears.

Under Bruce Lunkley, we memorized everything for the Austin College A Capella Choir. Robert Frost’s complete works became part of my library after we sang his poetry set to music by Randall Thompson in “Frostiana.” To this day, I can recite “Choose something like a star” for those times when “the mob is swayed To carry praise or blame too far.”

Soon I adopted the phrase: “A song for every occasion and every occasion for a song.” And when I first heard “How Can I Keep From Singing” (My Life Flows On, 821, *Glory to God*), it seemed as if it had been written for me.

So this Lenten Season, inspired by my friend Shirley Ashford, I am doubling my prayers by exploring hymns, old and new, in the rich treasure that is the new *Glory to God* hymnbook. I’m starting with new-to-me “Sign Us with Ashes” (433) and ending with “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded” (221). I have the app on my iPad, too, so if I come to an unfamiliar one, I can play the mp3 or pluck the tune on my harp. With the scriptural index, during the week I’ll meditate on the hymns for the lectionary passages for the coming Sunday.

Each hymn informs and builds my faith. All those words embroidered onto my heart and mind with melody guide my praise and inspire hope, courage, perseverance, reverence, and joy.

Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow!



– Linda Whitworth-Reed (MDiv'08)

12. Family devotions

What is Lent? Some people believe that Lent is a time when you give up something but fail to understand the reason for the self-denial. Self-denial is an action that enables an individual to restrain from one's personal desires or interests. As a Christian, I believe self-denial is the realization that "it is not about the individual person ... it is all about God."

Initially, when I observed Lent, I had a two-fold plan: 1) fast for forty days to lose weight; and 2) spend more time in prayer to improve my relationship with God. As I matured spiritually, I began to realize that I was fasting for the wrong reason! Throughout my Christian spiritual journey, whether experiencing good days or bad days, I learned to call on the Name of Jesus Christ. Whenever I am spiritually thirsty, I ask Jesus to quench my thirst! Through praying, fasting and faith, I have seen mountains move, supernatural breakthroughs, and miracles. Lord, thank you for deliverance!

Today, Lent is a part of my spiritual DNA—the fundamental and distinctive characteristic of who I am as a Christian. I intentionally spend time in the presence of the Lord. I accomplish this through studying, praying, fasting, reflecting, listening, remembering, appreciating, giving, and proclaiming the Good News.

In 2017, I encouraged my family to join me in observing the season of Lent as we prepared for Resurrection Sunday. Our goals were to grow spiritually, repent of sins, and self-denial. Our self-denial was to fast from negative thinking, regardless of tribulations we may have encountered. To help us accomplish this goal, we read a book entitled, *The 40-Day Fast from Negative Thinking* by Dvine Roman. We connected on a weekly basis via tele-conference call to discuss the book, share our experiences, and encourage one another. Each call began with an uplifting devotion and ended with powerful prayers. By the end of Lent, 85% of the participants improved their ability to think positively. Most importantly, we became closer to God and strengthened our family relationships.

In closing, Isaiah 55:6 encourages us to seek and call upon the Lord while the Lord may be found. Therefore, do not let this Lenten season pass you—deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow Jesus Christ!

Almighty God, thank you for allowing us to approach your throne of grace. Speak to us during Lent, Lord; for your servants are listening. Amen

– Cheryl R. Wilson (MDiv'16)



13. *Deal with the pain*

A few years ago, I was carrying a painful set of memories that I was eager to release. Anger, hurt, loss, rejection, feelings of betrayal—I wanted to be free of this unhappiness. So, as Lent approached, I devised a Lenten practice. The discipline involved some fabric, some toothpicks, and eventually, some matches.

Before Ash Wednesday, I went to the fabric store and searched for cloth whose colors and patterns represented the situation from which I wanted to be released. Finally, I found the material. I bought a very small amount and brought it home. My next job was to get out my seldom-used sewing kit and make a kind of a pouch. For some people, this would have been easy. I, however, am not much of a seamstress. Eventually, I managed to make a kind of a square envelope out of my fabric. Next, I gathered toothpicks and put them into a small jar.

When Ash Wednesday dawned, I began to carry this pouch-and-toothpick burden with me through each day. Every time I felt one of those dark feelings, I put in a toothpick. If I was at home, I went to wherever the pouch was to deposit my toothpick. If I was driving, I kept track of exactly how many toothpicks I needed to put in the pouch when I arrived at my destination. It became quite an ordeal, keeping up with how many times I had a dark thought and getting the representative toothpicks into the pouch. Furthermore, as Lent continued, my pouch-burden became quite prickly. Toothpicks began to poke out of my poorly constructed envelope. They sometimes stuck my hands and fell out, so that I had to poke them back in. It was messy and troublesome, carrying around this sack that represented my resentment and anger. How much easier it was simply to feel the feelings (uncomfortable as they were) than to deal with this thorny mess in my hands!

Finally, the end of Lent arrived. On Holy Saturday, I carried the spikey pouch outside, struck a few matches, and watched it burn. Flames engulfed the blues and reds and yellows of the fabric, the sharp toothpicks became ashes, and amazingly, the hurt inside of me slowly melted away. I dug a hole and buried the ashes. I was ready, in God's good time, to be raised to new life.

– Catherine Robinson (MDiv'86)



14. True humility

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." - 1 Peter 5:6

Thinking about the level and amount of intense focus required in developing and maintaining humility is simply exhausting, like reading this sentence. In fact, over the past few years, my participation in various Lent practices, traditions, and rituals continues to increase due to my desire to acquire humility.

My ignorance led me to believe that possessing humility took practice and skill. I literally thought developing humility required skill development and emotional sophistication. Day after day, I practiced loving responses and holy gestures resembling exceptional Christian character and conduct. Many of these practice sessions were unsuccessful. One example was the "stoic shuffle" which requires a slow and deliberate walk, bowed head, somber face, and hands behind the back.

Unfortunately, I was completely unaware of the spiritual damage my actions were causing others and myself. Acting humble is not being humble. Regardless of my many attempts, I was unable to create a humble heart. Although I believed the community thought they were witnessing humility in action, they were actually being manipulated by an Oscar-worthy actor.

Humility is a virtue and a gift from God. It is not a performance. Humility grants me the ability to trust my heart is in God's hands. The results of this test have inspired me to understand that all of my resolutions, rituals, and practices lack the power to change my heart. Ultimately, the condition of my heart will not change unless I sincerely focus on God and allow God's grace to quicken my spirit so that I may become truly humble.

- William West (MDiv'16)



15. *Contemplative photography*

In recent years I've begun a practice that I've undertaken with some earnestness. It may be a function of my getting older, or a personal need born from trying to survive spiritually in a deeply polarized society. I am speaking of contemplative photography as a spiritual practice.

Think about it: when we look at the world through a camera lens, the narrowing of vision works to focus our attention, bringing an intensity of concentration we usually don't have otherwise. Bringing a camera to the eye makes me pay closer attention to what's around me. I'm forced to slow down and, in so doing, find myself less anxious, more "in the moment." I am able to take greater account of the world, its wonder, its mystery, and its pathos. Thus "present" to the world, I am more present to the God who dwells with us and who embraces this world in love.

Christine Valters Paintner captures the richness of combining photography with contemplation in her little book, *Eyes of the Heart*. She writes, "Contemplative practice requires that we shift our normal affinity for thinking, analyzing, and producing, and surrender ourselves to a different way of being in the world, one that is more intuitive, more about mystery and unfolding rather than about planning." As a life-long planner, I know much about the illusion of control and self-management. With contemplative photography, Paintner says, "We follow the flow of life instead of trying to control its direction. We release our expectations of what we think we should see, and then see what is actually there."



As people of faith, we lean into the world trusting that God is present everywhere, even when God seems absent. Learning to see God's presence is a practice of baptismal living. A camera helps me truly "see" what I might otherwise be too busy to notice. And, often, I am moved in a way that registers awareness of God "with-us." Eyesight becomes insight into the world, connecting me with the God who will not abandon us; indeed, who suffers with us. Such insight prompts me to praise, thanksgiving, lament, and intercession. Such praying born from contemplation is made possible by looking through the lens of a camera.

– *David B. Batchelder* (MDiv'93)

16. Keeping Sabbath

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” – Isaiah 55:2

“O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” – Psalm 63:1

Several years ago, I came to Lent feeling “dry and weary.” The spirit and energy with which I entered ministry had disappeared. It had become less like a vocation and more like a venue. Sermons felt like a performance, not a reflective offering. Details for endless programming crammed my to-do list. My days were packed with meetings and the adrenaline rush of getting to them. In my mind, this was “important” work I was doing, but something in me would not buy it.

One night, preparing for a sermon, I read these passages from Isaiah and the Psalms. The words of Isaiah went right to my core, where the voice of the psalmist echoed in the parched center of me. Things had to change.

That Lent, I began a weekly Sabbath—a fast from all things ministry and work related. Each Friday, I stepped out of my ministry role to feed my soul by being WITH God as a person.

The days began simply, with a candle and prayer. I went to a nearby park, where I alternately walked and sat still all day. I kept a journal of Sabbath sightings. I experienced a world I never saw firsthand while at my laptop or in a meeting: the way the light changes the appearance of a place as the sun goes through the day; the creak of branches in the wind; how children play on a playground.

This practice did not magically open space in my calendar. But it began for me a different way of walking with God in the world. It did—and does—change my orientation to the work of ministry. Today I start with prayer and listening, not with a to-do list. Then I move into the day to labor for that which does satisfy: building loving connection with God and others as I continually seek to participate in how God is at work in and through us all. And I am grateful.

– Meinda Veatch (MDiv'96)



17. The Daniel Fast



One of the spiritual practices I use for the season of Lent is fasting. Fasting is not only a good way to cleanse the body of the waste we damage it with on a daily basis, but it is a way of getting closer to our Lord. However, the secret of any fast is not what we keep from entering our stomachs or how good we are at self-control, but what comes from our heart.

Last year, I prepared for the congregation a Bible study because I wanted them to learn and understand this particular spiritual practice that we might as a church do together. Some scriptural references used were Exodus 32:2, 1 Kings. 19:8, Ezekiel 10:6, Daniel 1:8,12 just to name a few. Many did not know the various forms of fasting, such as: *Absolute*: one does not eat or drink anything during the fasting period. Rarely is the Absolute Fast practiced for a long period of time and it is not recommended (Ex.34:28). *Normal*: one only consumes water during the fasting period. (1 Kings. 19:8; Matt. 4:2). *Partial*: some foods are consumed but others are restricted, often called the Daniel Fast (Daniel 1:12).

Fasting is a spiritual tool that God created to help strengthen our spirit, learn self-control of our flesh, draw closer to our Father, and focus on prayer. Fasting also leads to a deeper worship of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

We reviewed several models of fasting, but the one we focused on was the Daniel Fast. We chose that model because many of the congregants are on medications with which food is a requirement. While we wanted to use the spiritual tool to help us get closer to God, we did not want or need any medical emergencies while trying to get there. The purpose of this fast is to gain a healthier life or for healing (Isaiah 58:8) and spiritual breakthroughs (Daniel 1:8), according to authors Susan Gregory and Elmer Townes respectively.

As we fasted during Lent, each with our specific prayer requests, God blessed and answered some prayers by Resurrection Sunday. Others of us continued praying after the fast for our breakthroughs. When you fast, be specific, be intentional, and listen for the Lord.

- Sheila Sidberry-Thomas (MDiv'14)

18. *Constructing the Christian life*

“The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ‘Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ So I went down to the potter’s house and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, but he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.” –Jeremiah 18:1–4

I’ve always been a Lego fan, but my experience of Lego sets from the 1970s pales in comparison to the elaborate sets of today. Most of my childhood pieces were simple rectangle blocks. Every vehicle looked like a box with four wheels. Today, you can order an \$800 Lego set of the Millennium Falcon from the Star Wars movies. This one model comes with 7,500 pieces and 8 separate instruction booklets.

My daughters (ages 11 and 9) both share a love for Legos. Fortunately, they are not yet fans of Star Wars, so my \$800 is safe for now! Sometimes when we build and rebuild our Legos, we talk about the work of God in creating heaven and earth. I’ll ask, “What’s the most amazing thing God has created?” Answers have included horses, macaroni and cheese, and puppies.

But there is a spiritual lesson that comes from playing with Legos: God is like a careful builder, working with all the pieces to build (and sometimes rebuild) something that is pleasing in His sight. This work is a labor of love because God always wants our hearts and minds to mimic that of Christ our Lord. Working with Legos serves as a good reminder of what Lent is all about.

As my daughters and I assemble various Lego pieces into a purposeful creation, we have the opportunity to talk about those things we’ve done that we’re sorry for. We talk about how to be kinder to those at school. We talk about trusting in God because God is always part of our daily lives. God is like a careful builder.

Moving through this season of Lent gives us the opportunity to consider those areas of our lives that need the careful hands of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. What part of your life does God need to work on?

– *Andy Smith* (M.Div ’99)



19. Triduum

When I came to Austin Seminary, it was the first time I experienced Triduum, and I certainly wasn't alone in that experience. What is Triduum, you ask? Triduum is simply the Three Days and is one worship service which spans across the days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Maundy comes from the Latin word "mandate" and refers to Jesus's commandment "to love one another as I have loved you." It is embodied through the practice of washing the feet of our fellow congregants. Good Friday goes through the story of Jesus's betrayal, trial, and crucifixion, making space for us to confess our sins and the part we play in Jesus's betrayal even today. Good Friday ends with the stripping of the church, removing or covering the signs of Jesus's presence to portray Jesus in the tomb. The Triduum service concludes with the Holy Saturday Vigil, a movement of four parts that leads us into Easter.

The Holy Vigil starts after dusk on Saturday with a Service of Light, where a fire is lit as a representation of Christ's renewed presence in the world. We light the Paschal candle and process into an area that is prepared for the Service of Reading. This area is illuminated only by candles lit from the Paschal candle and twelve passages are read, depicting the story of God through the Old Testament beginning with Genesis and ending with Daniel. We then process into the chapel where we renew our baptismal vows in the Service of Water and hear the Word and receive Communion in the Service of the Word.

This practice in its entirety is incredibly moving and gives space for not only the entirety of Jesus's story but the wide range of human experience. We don't just get to experience the resurrection Sunday morning; we experience the sorrow of those moments where Jesus seems gone forever, the connection to our fellow human as we lower ourselves to wash their feet, the presence of God in our lives where we might not otherwise notice or remember it. This tradition strengthened my understanding of Lent and Easter, deepened my faith, and enriched my experience at Austin Seminary, and I would recommend it to everyone.

– Erica Nelson (MDiv'18)



20. Good Friday

A significant practice I observe during Lent is in the form of worship on Good Friday. Each year my local congregation gathers to remember and celebrate the immeasurable sacrifice fulfilled at Calvary. We invite seven preachers to deliver sermons based on the seven last sayings of Christ from the cross, as recorded in the Gospels. With each sermon we envision the details of the suffering our Messiah endured, while through worship our anticipation grows as we look toward the ultimate victory of Resurrection Sunday.

For the past four years, a second worship service on Good Friday evening has provided an opportunity to take the witness of Jesus to another level. Through the relationships of several pastors, and the support of numerous churches, a citywide worship service has been held at the Frank Erwin Center in downtown Austin. This event, which has drawn as many as 15,000 people at one time, lifts up the Cross for the entire city to see. The service consists of worship through prayers, singing, and sermonic reflections on the eternal importance of Good Friday. The service culminates with every believer commemorating Good Friday by sharing together at the Lord's Table with communion.

For me, Good Friday is the moment during Lent when I spend the greatest amount of time in self-reflection and thanksgiving. Good Friday reminds me salvation was not free and just how much God loves me. Good Friday reminds me of the definition of unselfish and unending love. Good Friday reminds me I am forgiven and set free, that neither death nor the grave has the final word ... because Sunday is coming!

- Daryl Horton (M.Div '15)



21. Triduum – the Easter Vigil

Triduum is known to be the most solemn observance of the liturgical year and the most sacred period of the Christian calendar. The word comes from Latin roots meaning “three days” which signifies the period lasting from Maundy Thursday to Resurrection Sunday. Triduum commemorates the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ through various liturgies and songs. During such a special period, fellow Christians are drawn together into the power and beauty of the Paschal Mystery—that in dying Christ destroyed death and in rising Christ restored life.

Every year, with great anticipation, students at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary await the various worship services and liturgical celebrations that take place during Triduum. Under the guidance of Professors Jennifer Lord and Eric Wall, the chapel team—that includes Beadles, preachers, choir members, and volunteer students—designs and implements the blueprint of how Triduum ought to be celebrated. This blueprint is a complex set of ideas, liturgies, songs, scriptures, rituals, and sermons that are carefully crafted or selected in order to conceive a Maundy Thursday service of Holy Communion, a solemn service of Good Friday, and a fascinating Easter Vigil that concludes in fellowship and celebration at midnight.

I had the noble opportunity to serve as a Beadle (worship assistant) during my second and third year in seminary. Both years I was particularly assigned to assist in the crafting and implementing of the liturgies surrounding the Easter Vigil. The first part of the Easter Vigil service involves the reading of twelve scripture passages from the Old Testament that lead to the so expected hope of the Messiah. The majestic beauty of this particular service involves the delicate balance between music and scripture. This part of the vigil takes place in the atrium of the McCord Community Center. The venue is adorned with banners and illuminated with candles, which presents an opportunity to dwell in darkness while admiring the light. The multi-sensory experience presented at this part of Triduum is quite memorable and ultimately becomes a capsule outside time and space that enables its participants to place themselves in the mystery surrounding the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Messiah.

If you have not had the opportunity to experience such a meaningful and transforming liturgical observance, I invite you to consider visiting and becoming part of this beautiful mystery.

– *Jasiel Hernandez* (MDiv'18)



22. *Easter*

Easter Day can be a weird day—especially if it comes without the preparatory discipline of Lent and Holy Week. When I was a kid, growing up in low-church South Carolina, it was possible for churches to celebrate Palm Sunday and then to go dark, essentially, until the following Sunday. There would likely be no Maundy Thursday service, no Good Friday service, and no Easter Vigil service. So, as a child, I would go to church on Palm Sunday and witness a processional with the clergy, choir, and children carrying palm branches and singing hymns packed with “Hosannas;” and then come back the next Sunday—Easter—for another, generally larger and brassier procession with clergy and choir singing hymns packed with “Alleluias.” We would move from one parade to another, and that was about it. Things were changing, though, thank God. Liturgical customs, even in low-church South Carolina, were recovering the ancient practices of the Church.

Now, at the Seminary, and in most churches I know of, we marinate in Lent and Holy Week. We taste the pathos of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, we re-embody the death of Jesus and the hardness of the Cross on Good Friday, and—in what is now my favorite service of the whole season, that starts with “civil twilight” and ends near midnight—we re-visit our salvation history through an ancient list of readings interspersed with hymns and other musical

reflections. We build a fire outside the chapel, and from it we light the new Paschal Candle behind which we—all of us, a hundred or more students and faculty and visitors—process around the campus as if we are wandering in the wilderness. Eventually, we end at the Chapel, where we re-engage the waters of baptism until we're soaking wet, then hear the Easter text proclaimed, and finally celebrate the Eucharist. Easter becomes in the process something we don't merely remember, but in fullness recapitulate—until it is as if we die with Jesus and rise with Christ.

I am especially grateful if we get to sing an ancient hymn that is new to me: "There in God's Garden." It is six verses long, and the last two verses are hard for me to sing without tears in my eyes:

"This is my ending; this, my resurrection; into your hands, Lord,
I commit my spirit.

This I have searched for; now I can possess it. This ground is
holy.

All heaven is singing, 'Thanks to Christ whose passion offers in
mercy

healing, strength, and pardon. Peoples and nations, take it; take
it freely!

Amen! My Master!"

- Theodore J. Wardlaw, President



My Lenten Field Notes

Lined writing area for field notes.

Theodore J. Wardlaw, *President*

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

G. Archer Frierson II, *Chair*

James C. Allison	J. Sloan Leonard, MD
Janice L. Bryant (MDiv'01, DMin'11)	Sue B. McCoy
Claudia D. Carroll	Matthew Miller (MDiv'03)
Katherine B. Cummings (MDiv'05)	W. David Pardue
Thomas Christian Currie	David Peeples
Jill Duffield (DMin'13)	Denise Nance Pierce (MATS'11)
Jackson Farrow Jr.	Mark B. Ramsey
Beth Blanton Flowers, MD	Conrad M. Rocha
Stephen Giles	Matthew E. Ruffner
Jesús Juan González (MDiv'92)	Lana E. Russell
Walter Harris Jr.	Lita Simpson
John S. Hartman	Martha Crawley Tracey
Bobbi Kaye Jones (MDiv'80)	John L. Van Osdall
Keatan A. King	David F. White
Steve LeBlanc	Carlton D. Wilde Jr.
	Elizabeth C. Williams
	Michael G. Wright

Trustees Emeriti

B.W. Payne, Max R. Sherman & Louis H. Zbinden Jr.

FACULTY

David H. Jensen, *Academic Dean*

Margaret Aymer	Jennifer L. Lord
Gregory L. Cuéllar	Jennifer Owens-Jofré
Lewis R. Donelson	Suzie Park
Bridgett Green	Cynthia L. Rigby
William Greenway	Asante U. Todd
David W. Johnson	Eric Wall
Carolyn Browning Helsel	Theodore J. Wardlaw
Philip Browning Helsel	David F. White
Paul K. Hooker	Melissa Wiginton
Timothy D. Lincoln	

Faculty Emeriti

John Alsup, Ellen Babinsky, Ismael Garcia,
John R. Hendrick & Ralph Underwood

For the glory of God, and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary is a seminary in the Presbyterian-Reformed tradition whose mission is to educate and equip individuals for the ordained Christian ministry and other forms of Christian service and leadership; to employ its resources in the service of the church; to promote and engage in critical theological thought and research; and to be a winsome and exemplary community of God's people.

—Mission Statement



AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

100 E 27th Street | Austin, TX 78705 | AustinSeminary.edu