



# 12 Days of Christmas

Meditations by Tish Dersnah  
Prayers and Scriptures from the  
Revised Common Lectionary

HOLY FAITH CHURCH



# Dear friends

One of the many promises of Christmas is that God is with us. Not content to love us from a distance, God comes to us and lives among us in the particular person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Two thousand years after Jesus walked the earth, God's promise to be with us is still fulfilled. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God is with us through the love of friends and neighbors, the beauty of creation, and the silence of a still moment.

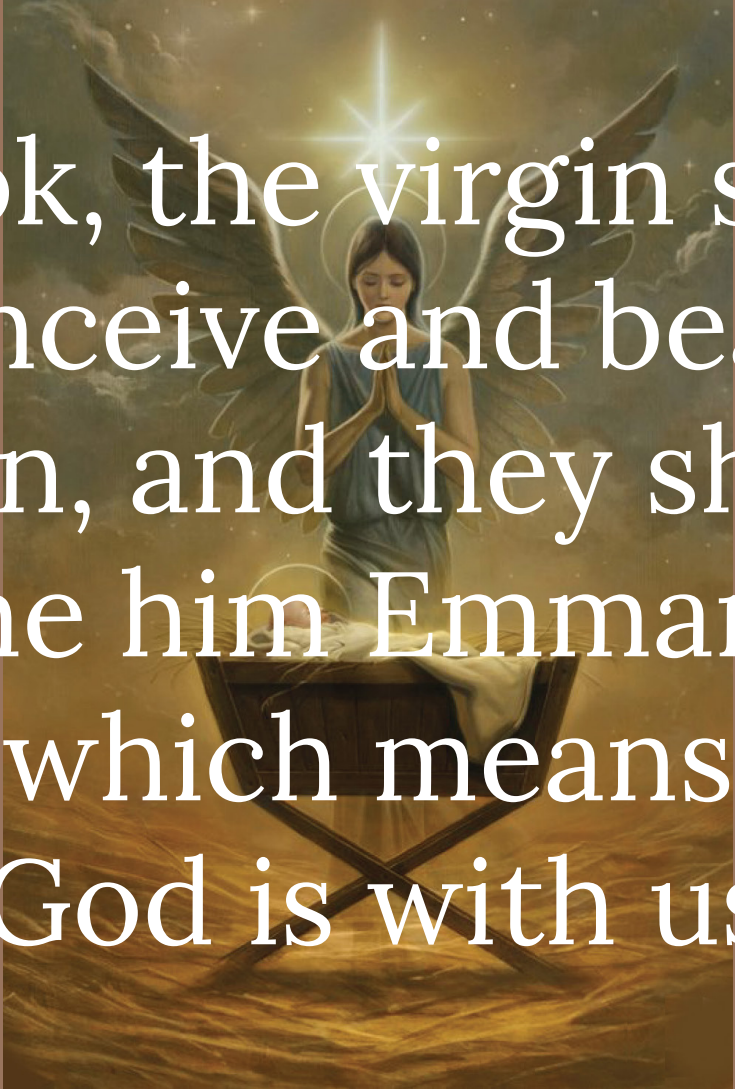
Every week since the coronavirus first changed our lives, Tish Dersnah has written weekly meditations. Each edition has pointed us toward God's presence in our ordinary lives. The everyday sacred, you might say. This Christmastide, how is God with you? Where do you see goodness, mercy, beauty, or justice? When have you been given wisdom or insight that seems to come from above?

Thank you, Tish, for encouraging a habit of thinking that looks for God's presence. An awareness of God's presence is no doubt the best "present" any of us can receive. No matter your circumstances this Christmas, may you unwrap the joys of God's love for you.

In Christ's love and hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrea +".

Pastor Andrea Martin  
Holy Faith Church



Look, the virgin shall  
conceive and bear a  
son, and they shall  
name him Emmanuel,  
which means,  
“God is with us.”

Matthew 1:23



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# 01

## Feast of the Nativity

### Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born [this day] of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.



### Isaiah 52:7-8

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

# Be Kind. Always.

When I was in high school, my close friends and I use to record quotes or snippets of poetry that meant something to us. Don and my kids did, and still do, chuckle about this. Somehow, this didn't seem to be something one did in high school. Well, not for them but it was for me. I'm not sure how we got started doing this, but it is a practice I still find meaningful.

Somewhere in between moves and purging I have lost my original notebook, but I still remember some of my favorites. I know I've included some in these meditations, but here is another. I may have quoted it in another meditation, but if so, it is just because it means so much to me.

*If I can stop one heart from breaking,  
I shall not live in vain;  
If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one fainting robin  
Unto his nest again,  
I shall not live in vain.*

Oh, Emily Dickinson! She spoke to me way back in my teen years and now in my more "mature" years! In a similar vein, I read a prayer today as I was looking

through some essays on Acts. *"Lord, let me do one anonymous act of kindness."*

Somehow it just feels as if this world needs a good shot of kindness. There is so much discord and misunderstanding and despair and sadness, and just plain meanness. It is like a tsunami of anguish. I surely know I can't counteract all those feelings by myself. But for my own soul and heart and life, I can start.

Since I began this meditation talking about quotes, here are two that I really like:

*"No act of kindness, no matter how small is ever wasted." – Aesop*

*"Kindness is free: sprinkle that stuff everywhere!." – Anonymous.*

At the church I attended before coming to Holy Faith, the rector, in a sermon, said to never forget that everyone in that room was hurting in some way. I haven't forgotten that. Ever. So, this is one quote that I have tattooed on my heart:

*"Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always."*



# 02

## Feast of St. Stephen

### Psalm 31:1-5

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.

Incline your ear to me; make haste to deliver me.

Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for you are my crag and my stronghold; for the sake of your Name, lead me and guide me.

Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me, for you are my tower of strength.

Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of truth.

## Prayer of the Day

We give you thanks, O Lord of glory, for the example of the first martyr Stephen, who looked up to heaven and prayed for his persecutors to your Son Jesus Christ, who stands at your right hand; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.



# Perspective

Recently, I went to one of my semi-annual visits to the Ventilation Clinic at University Hospital. As I have mentioned in another meditation, it was discovered maybe 15 years ago that I have a form of muscular dystrophy that while present at birth, starts really manifesting itself in later life. A visit to the Vent Clinic consists of seeing everyone and his uncle: pulmonologists, dietitians, social workers, physical medicine doctors, and respiratory therapists; all want to know how life is going, what changes there are. It is necessary but, oy, it can be exhausting.

While it has been a steep-ish curve learning to adapt and accommodate to my new situation, there has been a big reward. The reward? Perspective.

Perspective from a physical position.  
Perspective from an emotional level and  
perspective from an intellectual level.

My favorite Irish poet, John O'Donohue says: *"The way you look at things is the most powerful force in shaping your life."*

And all it takes is a slight redefining of how you look at things. Not just a physical tipping of the head, but a figurative tipping of one's attitudes.

Our dishwasher broke a while back so I am doing our dishes by hand. However, while I could have grumbled, I realized I really like doing the dishes this way. The warm water washing over my hands, the chance to slow down and watch my birds out the window or seeing the trees bloom and grow and change colors.

When I am in my wheelchair, I am grateful for all the people who scurry over to help me. You'd be amazed! And find your heart warmed.

When I am tired, I am grateful for the time to nose around on my computer or read.

When I take Lola for our morning walk and I am on my scooter, I have finally (after 8 years) gotten to know my neighbors who have ventured over to see who this person is walking the dog in such an unusual manner.

When I wake up in the morning, I am more than grateful for another day. At bedtime I give thanks for that day.

So, my wish for you all is, again from John O'Donohue: *"May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder."*



# 03

## 1st Sunday after Christmas

### John 1:14 & 16

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.



### Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## Rest

I have always dreamed of a big kitchen with lots of counter space, an island, a separate spot for people to sit, tons of storage space, huge pantry. However, in my house-owning days, I have never had a kitchen that came close. Our first house had a lovely pantry, but not much counter space. Our second house had less counter space and a very, very finicky oven. Now, our kitchen at The Farm is what we generously call a galley kitchen.

Now as it turns out, this kitchen is just about perfect. Don bought me an Amish-made wooden stool that swivels. I can sit in the middle of the kitchen and just about reach the counters on either side. With my neuro-muscular stuff, it seems this kitchen is just what I need. Most everything is within reach and if it isn't, I scooch my stool down or call on someone taller (most of the population!).

With my two grandkids now living here, we are learning to do a new kitchen dance. Don and I, over these many years, have the dance down pat.

But now we have some new steps to learn: someone at the toaster, someone making oatmeal, someone sitting on a stool, waiting their turn. It is amazing to me how well we are adapting.

Things do get a little crowded when Lola (the dog) decides to jump into the dance. But even Lola is getting adept at side-stepping and cha-cha-ing her way from the refrigerator to the stove.

We are also learning to adapt to each other. I am trying not to mother my grandkids too much. They realize that while I don't have strenuous housekeeping rules, I do have a few quirks which, when attended to, make life easier for all of us.

And we respect their privacy. As Becky was heading downstairs for a two-hour class, I suggested she take a banana with her. Then I stopped and apologized for being "motherish."

*"No worries," said Becky. "Love is shown in all different kinds of ways, including reminding someone to take a banana with them."*

My wise granddaughter. How right she is. And in these difficult times what a good piece of advice. But how can we show love to others? To ourselves? To our families? Much of the time most of us feel as if we are running on empty. How can we fill up our personal gas tank? I try to remember that I am not in charge of the whole world.

When I need to fill my emotional tank, I think about this good advice.

## **LET YOURSELF REST**

*If you're exhausted, rest.*

*If you don't feel like starting a new project, don't.*

*If you don't feel the urge to make something new, just rest in the beauty of the old, the familiar, the known.*

*If you don't feel like talking, stay silent.*

*If you're fed up with the news, turn it off.*

*If you want to do nothing, let yourself do nothing today.*

*Feel the fullness of the emptiness, the vastness of the silence, the sheer life in your unproductive moments.*

*Time does not always need to be filled. You are enough, simply in your being.*  
— Jeff Foster

So when I'm rested, I am better able to reach out in love: smiling at someone through my mask (love shows in the eyes, too), giving thanks for beautiful fall days, petting my dog, writing a note to a friend, making a loaf of bread for someone, and even offering someone a banana.

# 04

## Feast of St. John, Transferred

### Prayer of the Day

Shed upon your Church, O Lord, the brightness of your light, that we, being illumined by the teaching of your apostle and evangelist John, may so walk in the light of your truth, that at length we may attain to the fullness of eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



### 1 John 1:5

This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.



# Let Us Not Lose Faith

Easter has come and gone. And for most of us, it was an Easter unlike any that we have experienced.

We all tried to make the best of it, perhaps grumbling a bit or feeling a loss of favorite traditions. However, I got to thinking that this new way of experiencing this day really doesn't compare to what the Apostles must have felt on that first Easter morning.

But, yet, I feel a solidarity with them. For them, for us, so much has changed. Life is turned upside down and sideways. Life is uncertain. The known past longed for. The present confusing. The future cloudy. What do we do?

I read a sermon of Rev. William Barber II. He is pastor of Greenleaf Christian Church in North Carolina. He said that:

*"In the midst of this world's darkness, the Christian story of the resurrection points towards the power of hope. As we weather a global pandemic, Easter offers*

*a moment for us to reflect. This Easter, the resurrection gives us a path forward. Our ability to love and care for one another persists."*

And the extra good news is that while we can always take comfort in prayer, if we are still and listen, we find ways to keep going different from anything we can imagine.

Steve Jobs once wrote: *"Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith."*

Let's not lose faith. Let's not lose hope. Let's use this time to listen, to pray, to accept that life is different, to let us live more easily in the now, trusting in God. Knowing that from our Lord, love and peace are there for the taking.

*"Now be silent. Let the One who creates the words speak. He made the door. He made the lock. He also made the key."*

— Jalaluddin Mevlana Rumi



# 05

## Holy Innocents

### Matthew 2:13-18

When the wise men had departed, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

*"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."*



## Prayer of the Day

We remember today, O God, the slaughter of the holy innocents of Bethlehem by King Herod. Receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims; and by your great might frustrate the designs of evil tyrants and establish your rule of justice, love, and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



# Resilience

I just finished reading a remarkable book called *Torpedoed* by Deborah Heiligman. It is the story of the sinking of an English ship carrying children to safety from England to Canada during World War II. It was torpedoed by the Germans and most did not survive. At the end, the author interviewed one of the children who had survived, Sonia Bech Williams.

The author stated: *"Those five days (we spent) with the 89-year-old Sonia changed our lives. When we asked her how she kept so cheerful, even in the face of illness and loss, she said, "I was torpedoed. I am resilient."*

Thinking about that, I thought, *"Well, we have all surely been torpedoed by this virus."*

And then I thought, am I resilient? I think I am. I hope I am. Maybe?

Then this morning I found this quote:

*"Resilience is accepting your new reality, even if it's less good than the one you had before. You can fight it, you can do nothing but scream about what you've lost, or you can accept that and try to put together something that's good."*

— Elizabeth Edwards

Pretty good advice, but I would add a caveat: we're all doing the best we can with circumstances we have very little control over.

So, if we need to fight or scream or sigh or complain or feel irritated, that is okay. The answer, it seems to me, is to allow yourself the space to feel all those things and then get down to making this new space we are living in work.

And, as always, if we stop and think about it, there is this good news. Even when we grouse and kvetch and are cranky, God loves us. To bits. And like the biggest safety net you can imagine, God will be there for us while we find our way on this new path.

And finally, here are some bracing words from my favorite Irish poet, John O'Donohue:

*"I arise today Blessed by all things, Wings of breath, Delight of eyes, Wonder of whisper, Intimacy of touch, Eternity of soul, Urgency of thought, Miracle of health, Embrace of God. May I live this day Compassionate of heart, Clear in word, Gracious in awareness, Courageous in thought, Generous in love."*

# 06

## 6th Day of Christmas

### Psalm 27:1

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?

## Prayer of the Day

Teach us to look ahead with hope, each day as a gift, each breath, a movement of the Spirit, each person, Christ in our midst.

To a new year, whatever may come.

To a steadfast God, who goes wherever we go.

Amen.





# Beautiful Views

I've been thinking a lot about windows this week. Every morning, Facebook posts a memory from my past posts. It is a nice boost to my brain. Sometimes I recall the memory and other times I go, huh?!? But, today's memory I do remember – a quote from a favorite e e cummings poem:

*I thank You God for most this amazing day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes...*

It was obviously a brighter day than this morning which out my window shows a drizzly and cloudy view. However, a day like today is also that *"which is natural which is infinite which is yes."*

Sitting in my sunroom which is 3 walls of windows, I have a window to the natural and I revel in it. Who will visit my "bird" table and bird feeders? The little squirrel, the chipmunk? Definitely those noisy blue jays and red-winged blackbirds. For a while I was lucky enough to see a Baltimore oriole and a rose-breasted grosbeak. And always keeping me company are the "brown birds" and my busy chickadee.

I can see my peonies getting ready to burst open. My lilacs are budding. Even that determined rosebush is growing.

On Facebook, someone started a post called *"What I See From My Window."* It has taken off like a 4th of July rocket and has become international. It is nothing more than a view from someone's window, but through those windows I have traveled to Romania, Nepal, all over America, Germany, Japan, and England. So many others. I've seen big and little gardens and pets and kids and *"leaping greenly spirits of trees."*

It has been wonderful, enlightening and somehow comforting. It somehow makes the world seem smaller and friendlier and more, well, normal.

Our souls are all a bit battered by now. We all long for a bit of normal. So, if, as Shakespeare said, *"the eyes are the windows of the soul,"* then let your eyes take in all that is natural, all that is yes. Let your soul rest in the beauty of your own backyard.

As John O'Donohue wrote:

*"Awaken to the mystery of being here and enter the quiet immensity of your own presence. Have joy and peace in the temple of your senses. ... Take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention. Be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul. May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder."*

# 07

## 7th Day of Christmas

### Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

It will be said on that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

## Prayer of the Day

Give us, O God, the vision which can see Your love in the world in spite of human failure.

Give us the faith to trust Your goodness in spite of our ignorance and weakness.

Give us the knowledge that we may continue to pray with understanding hearts.

And show us what each one of us can do to set forward the coming of the day of universal peace.

*(Frank Borman, Apollo 8 space mission, 1968)*



# Blessings

I have a confession to make. I LOVE CHRISTMAS!!! How crazy am I? I follow on Facebook a page called *365 Days of Christmas*. It counts down from December 26th slowly revving up to the next Christmas. It is sort of a way to ease us holiday-crazed people back to the real world. And it is nice to know I'm not alone in my mishigas (that's Yiddish for craziness or something over the top!).

When my kids were little, October, November, and December were a whirlwind. First came Halloween (candy, costumes), then next up was November: both kids' birthdays, Thanksgiving and then Don's birthday. December brought my brother's birthday, my sister's birthday, our annual trip to Chicago to see my parents, Don's and my anniversary and then the big day. Getting ready felt like training for a marathon! So being someone who appreciates organization, I developed a system that kept me right on track, straight through Boxing Day.

But more than the frenzy and fun and fervor of the seasons, I love how I feel. I am grateful every day for my life, but the holidays amplify that. I was reading a book by a man named Ace Collins. He has written some good books about the history of Christmas carols and history of Christmas traditions. He was describing

one activity that he had heard about and seemed to me to be perfect for this time of this year. Not tied to any holiday, it is a way to make us stop, take a breath, and note what is going on around us.

Perhaps someone already does this. I don't, but I will. Ace tells of a young woman who kept a "blessings box." This woman daily noted moments and observations that caused her to pause and see things that "*lift your spirits and touch your heart,*" in their simple beauty.

Every week I think life cannot get any more tense or more stress-filled. But it does. To combat that, I am going to put any blessing - big or small, extraordinary or ordinary - in my blessings box and add to it daily. When I feel my shoulders tensing, my breathing becoming shallow, and my nerves a bit frayed, I am going to go to my blessing box and remind myself of how much I have to be grateful for.

What you put in your box is totally up to you. Maybe you put a note in about what a blessing your dog is. Or what a blessing hot-buttered toast and tea are. Okay, so these are my kind of blessings, but you get the point! I am hoping that this can keep life in perspective and relieve stress, something we all need right now, not just during the holidays.



# 08

## Feast of the Holy Name

### Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



### Prayer of the Day

Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation: Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.



# Families

I suppose every family has one – a person interested in its history and genealogy. In mine, that's me. I cannot remember when I started wondering about my family. Perhaps it was the tidbits I had picked up from relatives. By my teens, I was hooked.

Back then, any researching had to be done via snail mail or gleaning information housed in dusty old courthouse basements. The internet and growth of genealogy websites makes it easier to search. I'm amazed at what I find. For example, Talle Jolliffe and I are cousins! We share the same 8th grandparents.

One of my favorite quotes is from a many times great grandmother who was a Quaker. Despite the pacifist leanings of most Quakers, she said she wished she had had more sons to serve in the fledgling colonial army.

And while studying my family history gives me pride and satisfaction, one of the things I have found is that I feel more connected to, well, everything. This country, the countries of my ancestors, their sacrifices, their bravery. And the net is thrown even wider when I feel that connection with the greater universe.

Herman Melville wrote:  
*"Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads."*

And those threads extend backward and, whether we know it or not, forward.

Motivational speaker Brené Brown says:  
*"I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."*

So, while I get strength from my history, I get even more strength from the connections in my current life.

Brené Brown again: *"Connection is why we're here; it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives."*

And I feel that connection each Sunday when we Zoom church or when I hear from a parishioner either by mail or email. It is one of the reasons I love being a greeter at church – the chance to reach out and feel that connection.

These are hard times right now. Some of us may not feel very connected with family, friends, church, or even God.

But please, remember Melville's *"invisible threads."* Whether we feel it or not, those threads reach out to the universe. I can tell you I feel those threads throughout my life. And you are all part of my life.



# 09

## 9th Day of Christmas

### Psalm 34:1-3

I will bless the Lord at all times, his  
praise shall ever be in my mouth.  
I will glory in the Lord; let the humble  
hear and rejoice. Proclaim with me  
the greatness of the Lord; let us exalt  
His name together.

### Prayer of the Day

Turn our eyes to the small and  
quiet ways you make yourself  
known.

In the simple and serene, the  
mundane and daily.

In our waking and sleeping,  
may we turn to you.

In our playing and working,  
may we offer our gifts to you.

In our questioning and  
believing, may we keep our  
hearts on your word.

Amen.



# Letting Go

I love October. I mean, what is there not to love? Lucy Montgomery, author of *Anne of Green Gables* has her heroine, Anne Shirley, proclaim: *"I am so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers."* You get warm days and cool nights. Flaming trees of red and yellow and orange. Sweet smells of fall. Luckily here in Lodi Twp. we can still smell burning leaves. Some evening someone will light their fireplace and the slightly acrid smoke will float through the air. As Anne Shirley also says, *"Dear World, you are very lovely and I am glad to be alive in you."*

I need that reminder. Do you? Each week seems crazier than the last and I sometimes wonder how much craziness we can hold. It all weighs one down. Yet, going outside, breathing in that October blue sky can really bring a sense of calm, a sense of rightness.

Poet Robert Browning said, *"God's in his heaven, all's right with the world."* So true but sometimes, especially now, that can be so hard to accept.

The United Methodist Church in Saline has a sign out front that in essence says God is not on vacation and he did not leave you in charge. It makes me laugh, ruefully I'll admit. But I always get a sense of relief when I read it. I am not in charge. Let go!

How hard is it to let go? To open ourselves up to trust? My granddaughter was telling me that she was trying to do yoga this morning. Her muscles just wouldn't cooperate. They kept wanting to hold on to the stress and tension, as if letting go was just too big a leap. Well, my brain can be the same, holding on to fears and worries (and there are a lot right now!). Letting go? Let me think about that. I'll get back to you! I mean, what will happen? Will I just flounder around unsupported? Of course, that won't happen.

Even if I am hesitant to let go, I think God understands. God understands our hearts and what we can and can't do. So even if my heart feels as tight as an unfurled flower bud, all I really need to do is pay attention to the world around me: friends calling or strangers smiling, neighbors waving hello on a bright October day, trees doing all they can to put color into the world, or family members hugging and holding on tight. Each encounter helps me let go a bit. I'm not alone now or in the past or in the future. I can rest in that assurance.

Let's work on releasing thoughts about old fears. Maybe we can make room for a little happiness. Let's think about new ways to go forward.



# 10

## 2nd Sunday After Christmas

### Prayer of the Day

O God, who wonderfully created,  
and yet more wonderfully  
restored, the dignity of human  
nature: Grant that we may  
share the divine life of him who  
humbled himself to share our  
humanity, your Son Jesus Christ;  
who lives and reigns with you, in  
the unity of the Holy Spirit, one  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.



### Psalm 84:4

Happy are the people  
whose strength is in you,  
whose hearts are set on the  
pilgrims' way.





# You Are Not Alone

It was such a beautiful morning today. Lola and I went for our walk and we more meandered than trotted along. We'll save those faster walks for brisker days. I looked at that gem of a blue sky and the flowers on my neighbors' porches. The air was still, but continued carrying that indefinable smell of lingering summer.

I needed that walk; it has been a hard week for friends and for the country. Each week I hear more people say, "I am so depressed" or "I'm so tired of this." It seems as if there is little but conflict or anger or loss. I even find myself shouting at the TV which accomplishes not much, I know. I don't cry easily, but have been choked up at the loss of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Commercials are making me teary. This is a sign to me that I need to give myself a good shake and start looking for things which can balance out the pain of our current time.

Mr. Rogers' mother, as we've often heard, always told him to look for the helpers. Madeleine L'Engle pushes Meg in *A Wrinkle in Time* to look for the "lights" in this world. It is all good advice and advice to which we should adhere. But sometimes those helpers and those lights get tired. I'm tired and I bet you are, too.

So, what to do? I found this quote of Albert Camus:

*"In the midst of hate, I found there was, within me, an invincible love. In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me, an invincible calm. I realized through it all that in the midst of winter, there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there is something stronger pushing right back."*

I love this quote. I need it. But what is there that can bring about that invincible calm? Where can I find it?

Meandering walks with my dog? Quiet times with a good book? Talking with friends? Receiving a cheerful note in the mail? I am making this too difficult. Let's not get lost in the noise and shouting. There is always somewhere to go.

Jesus reminds us: *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me... and you will find rest for your souls."*

God reminds us in Exodus: *"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

So, rest, my friends. Rest and refresh. And never forget that you are not alone.

# 11

## 11th Day of Christmas

### Prayer of the Day

God of the New Year, you walked with Abraham into an unknown land.

You counted the multitude of stars as his descendants. You walked with the Israelites into a new home and identity. You called prophets to new lands to share your word. You called your people to hear words of hope and restoration from your prophets.

You walked with Mary and Joseph to welcome the Savior in a manger. You called fisherman and tax collectors to leave all they knew to proclaim your kingdom. You turned a symbol of death into a symbol of hope and resurrection for all time.

You are no stranger to bringing your people from desperation to hope, from sickness to healing, from unbelief to belief, from uncertainty to peace. You're in the business of making all things new.

This year, this day, this moment,  
make me new.  
Amen.

## Exodus 3:1-5

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.

Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.'

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.'

Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'



# Tell Me What You Love

Usually by this time in November, I am hip deep in recipes and ingredients as I plan Thanksgiving. I love Thanksgiving Day, but I almost love the planning more.

About 10 years ago, my daughter, Katie, wrote a piece for The Ann Arbor News about my love of side dishes. At my best, we would have the turkey and around 15 side dishes.

Now, I'm counting small dishes like pickles and olives. But also, more involved dishes like the beloved pretzel salad and sweet potato pie. And it would not be Thanksgiving without lemon bread and homemade applesauce.

But this year will be different, won't it? Most of us will be hunkered down at home with just a small gathering.

Our grandkids will be dividing their time between here and their home so that means it will most likely be just Don and me for dinner.

I've cut back a little on the side dishes, but my heart just is not in it to go to a Spartan Thanksgiving. A Thanksgiving meal to me is a way to express how much I love the people for whom I am cooking.

I saw this quote and thought, yes!

*"It's easy to talk about all the things you don't like. Life's hard and full of disappointment. Tell me what you LOVE."*  
– Naena Hoffmann

We cannot change how things will be this year, but we can change how we view it. I don't want to sound like Pollyanna, but our mental health could use a boost of positivity now.

So, tell me what you LOVE. I really want to know. Through these meditations you know some of the things I love. But here are a few more: the first snow, the anticipation of Christmas, pie (especially my sweet potato pie which is the cat's pajamas!), stars in a cold winter sky, the nuthatch and tufted titmouse who come to my bird feeding table, and many more.

Now, these aren't big things. But, to me, they also aren't small things. Madeleine L'Engle wrote in *A Wind in the Door*: *"It is not always on the great or the important that the balance of the universe depends."*

I look forward to hearing about your loves. I bet spilling all that love into the universe will be a good thing. So, on Thanksgiving, know that when I count all my blessings, being able to share my thoughts with you is high on the list. The only thing higher is the blessings you are in my life.



# 12

## 12th Day of Christmas

### Prayer of the Day

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### Revelation 21:3

Behold, the dwelling of God is with mankind. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God.



# Hugs

I am a hugger. I love to get hugs and even more to give hugs. However, I realize not everyone feels this way. And I truly respect that. My mom was not a hugger. Neither was my sister. Don wasn't much of a hugger when I met him, but he finally decided it was easier to join in. And now he is a hugger – a really great hugger.

I have been thinking about hugs because in this quarantine the lack of actual human contact is the worst part for me. I can fill my time and keep connected virtually with family, friends, and Holy Faith. But no hugs? That's hard.

I was watching cellist Yo-Yo Ma on a CNN interview. He has been giving small "concerts" of comfort on YouTube and decided to do a longer one recently. When asked why, he said he likens music to giving people a hug, when many cannot receive physical touch during the coronavirus pandemic.

*"Music can caress. So it can hug. The air moves and you feel you are touched, literally touched, by the air that moves around you, and so I think it is something that gives comfort."*

Wow. I had never thought of it that way. And then I started thinking what else can feel like a hug?

Poetry. It often moves me. I will come across a stanza or line that will literally stop me in my tracks and feel my heart squeeze. Those heart squeezes are hugs. Sometimes at church, unbidden, I will feel a heart squeeze as I look around the congregation. My congregation. Hugs.

Thanks to Bishop Perry, I came upon an Irish theologian, Padraig O'Tuama. I started reading some of his poems and prayers. Boy, did he offer up the hugs! In fact, he wrote a whole essay on hugs.

O'Tuama hadn't grown up in a hugging household and while at a conference a woman asked for a hug.

*"Suddenly, I found my body being wrapped, folded, sheltered, and held into place by somebody else's arms, and my arms were around her body, and for the first time ever, I thought, This is what arms are for."*

Squeeze went my heart. So I am going to pay more attention to those heart squeezes during the quarantine. And not just during the quarantine. Even after we are freed up to hug each other again, I will keep track and realize that the universe is constantly giving me hugs, reminding me of all the ways I am sheltered in God's loving arms.







# The Hidden Meaning of the 12 Days of Christmas Song

**01**

Partridge in a Pear Tree  
Jesus Christ, Son of God

**02**

2 Turtle Doves  
Old and New Testaments

**03**

3 French Hens  
Faith, Hope & Charity

**04**

4 Calling Birds  
Gospels / Evangelists

**05**

5 Golden Rings  
1st 5 Books of Old Testament

**06**

6 Geese A-Laying  
Six Days of Creation

**07**

7 Swans A-Swimming  
The Seven Sacraments

**08**

8 Maids A-Milking  
Eight Beatitudes

**09**

9 Ladies Dancing  
Holy Spirit's Nine Fruits

**10**

10 Lords A-Leaping  
Ten Commandments

**11**

11 Pipers Piping  
Eleven Faithful Apostles

**12**

12 Drummers Drumming  
Articles of Apostle's Creed



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