

The Sword

"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" - Ephesians 6:17

St. Alban's Episcopal Church

February 2024

From Fr. Bill..... *"Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."*
The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Is love dead?" This is the question posed to a number of people, celebrities, politicians, and religious leaders in the first few minutes of the film, "A Case for Love," a documentary based on the teachings of our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry. "A Case for Love" premiered on January 23 in theaters across the country, and was seen by hundreds of congregations of various denominations, Christian and otherwise.

"Is love dead?" I admit, this question caught me, like everyone asked, off guard. If you look at certain aspects of our world – Americans are more polarized than at any point in the last two decades (economically, politically, ideologically), wars raging in Ukraine and in the Middle East – it seemed that the implicit answer would be "yes." Hence, the producer of the documentary made his case that love is not dead, but present in our world, through stories that focused on love's healing, inclusive, reconciling/forgiving, transformative power.

Bishop Curry once famously said, "The opposite of love isn't hate, but selfishness, a self-centered, all-about-me attitude and lifestyle at the expense of the other." Jesus calls us to love our neighbor, the stranger, and even our enemies. When we care only for ourselves at the expense of others, we are not following Jesus' commands. When we care only for ourselves at the expense of others, that is selfishness, not love.

Jesus teaches us that to love the other is to love in a manner that is selfless. We can still love ourselves and care for ourselves (if we don't, we cannot love each other). But we cannot allow the love of ourselves to become something that is all about ourselves. We can

do both. So, Bishop Curry and the producers of the film issued a challenge to do one act of selfless love a day for an entire month.

Why 30 days? Research shows that it takes some-

where between eight and 21 days to make something a habit. So if we commit to doing one act of selfless love a day for 30 days, the likelihood is that this will become a habit that will continue into the future.

Wednesday, February 14 marks the beginning of the season of Lent – a season of fasting and self-examination, penitence, and a turning again to God. It is also Valentine's Day – a day that stores and Hallmark has decided is the one day we are called to show our love to those we love. Now, it may be serendipity, coincidence, happenstance, or divine intervention that these two fall on the same day. What if, instead of giving something up for Lent, you fast in another way? What if you take on a new spiritual practice as a way of fasting from your old ways of doing something? What if this new spiritual practice is done every day, so that by the end of Lent, it becomes a habit?

My challenge to you, therefore, as you decide what you wish to "give up" for Lent, you give up of yourselves, and take on doing one act of selfless love once a day (whether big or small, it doesn't matter) for the full 40 days of Lent. Diary your acts and your feelings surrounding those acts, and when we gather together following our Easter celebration for a meal in the parish hall, let us share our stories of how we made our own case for love. Journals for "Making the Case for Love" will be available for you beginning on Ash Wednesday.



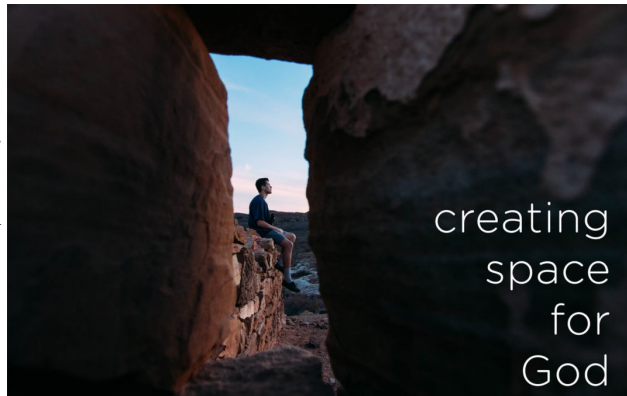
In this world we live in there is constant bombardment by something that wants our attention. We have the television to keep us informed and entertained. The internet, which, like the TV, informs, entertains, and also allows us to buy things. Even better, we have the smart phone, which informs, entertains, allows us to shop, and even receives phone calls.

Not counting working, cooking, cleaning, lawn work, and the occasional snow shoveling, eating, and sleeping, I find I have very little other time. After all of that we have our family and friends making demands on our time.

So, desperately looking for a good *Sword* article idea, I asked myself, “Where is God in my life?” How do I find God on the television, in the internet, or with my smartphone? Is it easy to find God at work in a profession with conflict designed into it at its very core? Is God found in the chaos of our lives? Am I looking for God in the right places?

Then, because I think out loud sometimes and because those cool little smartphones are always listening, an article pops up in my internet feed. The title is “Celebrating Lent – Creating Space for God” by Chris Cairns. I found it an insightful article. I’m stealing a little bit of it here. Also, I’m beginning to seriously distrust my phone.

I believe the original idea behind fasting for Lent was to do what Jesus did for 40 days. But Jesus was also do-



ing something else in the desert. Jesus was finding a way to commune with His Father. He removed himself from the nagging of all of his distractions and created a space for God.

I like the idea of giving something up that takes up our time and giving that time over to our walk with God. Give up doom scrolling on the phone. Do a book study with your church. Give up binge watching that internet show. Pick up playing board games on the kitchen table with your family. Give up being angry at traffic, even though it’s really easy. Pick up being kinder and gentler to the grocery store checkout person.

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:15-17a).

I feel the best about myself and my relationship with God every time I do something for someone else with no hope for reward or recognition. My journey with God seems to center around service.

Where do you feel God is in your life the most; the least? That’s where my Lenten journey is starting, so maybe it will work for you. I also encourage you all to read Isaiah Chapter 58 this Lenten season. I think it sets the tone for what a fast is supposed to look like. I pray you all have a blessed Lenten season.

Outreach Report**by Linda Peters**

If this looks vaguely familiar it’s because it is a repeat of my Lenten post from several years ago. It still holds true, so here it is again:

When I was a child, Lent was always my least favorite time of year. Not only was the weather lousy, but that stretch between Christmas and Easter was so long and grim. Church was all about giving up fun stuff and being constantly reminded that I was a flawed human being. It wasn’t until my middle adulthood that a friend from church gently suggested that “sacrifice” might mean adding something positive, going beyond my comfort zone, becoming a more loving person. What a revelation! I suggest to you that those gloomy 40 days can be filled with joy and self-refinement, and

can be a time of reaching out to others and to God. Instead of “giving up” why not reach out? Make someone’s day better, and if you have “flaws” work to see them as opportunities to more fully become the person God intended. So reach out by donating, volunteering, smiling more and grumping less, praying with thanksgiving, and focusing on the beauty around and within you. Have a joyful Lenten season!



“Dear Lord and Father of Mankind” – John Greenleaf Whittier, 1807 – 1892

By Henrietta O’Neill

In 1872, when John Greenleaf Whittier wrote the words to this hymn, it was not with the intent that it would one day be sung in churches across the land. John’s temperament was to worship God through the quiet inward communication of prayer and silent meditation, which he practiced within his Quaker congregation. Thus, this hymn bears the mark of its author, not only in his philosophy of a quiet faith, but in the beautiful rhythm of its poetic phrases.

Whittier began his life as a poet at an early age, but being quite poor he never attended a famous college. His encouragement to a literary career came from William Garrison, the editor of a weekly paper called the



Free Press. Thus began John’s career in writing and by 1866 he was considered a poet of national stature.

Because the Quaker services did not include hymns, John was reported to have said, “I am not really a hymn writer, for the good reason that I know nothing of music. Only a few of my piec-

es were written for singing. A good hymn is the best use to which poetry can be devoted, but I do not claim that I have succeeded in composing one.”

I encourage each of you to take a moment and read the verses of this hymn which is found in the 1982 hymnal, No. 652, or the *Worship and Rejoice* hymnal, No. 470.



Episcopal Church, including our own Bishop Kym Lucas; *The Night is Long but Light Comes in the Morning: Meditations on Racial Healing*, by Catherine Meeks, Executive Director of the Ab-salom Jones Center for Racial Healing;

February is Black History Month, a month where we celebrate the diversity of our Black siblings in Christ – their stories, their histories, their accomplishments, their light. For resources to learn more about Black history, check out *This Band of Sisterhood*, about the first five Black women elected as diocesan bishops in the

or *The Church Cracked Open*, by The Reverend Canon Stephanie Spellers, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry’s Canon for Evangelism and Reconciliation. Go to <https://www.churchpublishing.org/blackhistorymonth> for more resources.

Imagining Meetings with Bishop Kym in the New Year

Join Bishop Kym on Wednesday, February 21, 7 to 8:30 p.m., via Zoom, for a facilitated time of listening to one another, sharing and dreaming together, imagining what the future may hold, and how God is next calling us as the Episcopal Church in Colorado. In the February 21 meeting we will explore new paths of ministry (formation and discernment), how God is calling each of us and in community, finding



financial solutions to operational barriers for thriving ministry, and what does a fully-funded diocese look like? The meetings are a time of having intentional conversations and listening to one another. Our time together will include regional breakouts

led by our regional missioners and supported by the canons of the Bishop.

Lent Opportunities

To assist in your Lenten observance, St. Alban's is providing the following resources:

The Way of the Cross – Stations of the Cross: Beginning Wednesday, Feb. 21 and continuing every Wednesday through Lent, you are invited to come and walk the Way of the Cross/Stations of the Cross at 11 a.m. before the noon healing service, and at 5 p.m. before choir practice. "Take Home Way of the Cross" will be available for folks to use throughout Lent.

Saturday, March 2, Quiet Day Hosted by the Daughters of the King: All are invited to join St. Alban's Daughters of the King on March 4 from 9 a.m. to noon for a Lenten quiet day. A continental breakfast will be offered.

Lent Madness: The brainchild of the Reverend Tim Schenck, Lent Madness is a fun, engaging way for people to learn about the men and women comprising the Church's calendar of saints. Saints compete against each other in a "March Madness" tournament-like single elimination bracket. Go to www.lentmadness.org to subscribe.

Sunday Morning Book Study at 9 a.m. in Person and on Zoom: Beginning Sunday, February 18, our Sunday morning book study will begin its reading of *Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple* by Adam Hamilton. Books are \$17 and are available in the Parish Hall.

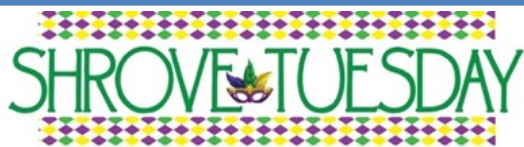
Thursday Evening Book Study at 7 p.m. on Zoom: Beginning Thursday, February 15, our Thurs-



day evening book study will begin its reading of Henri Nouwen's, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*. Books are available in the Parish Hall.

A Month of Unselfish Love Journal: Are you able to do one intentional act of unselfish love a day for a whole month? This is our challenge. Let us fast from selfishness and take on a new spiritual practice. The journal is meant to be a guide, prompting us to consider various aspects of unselfish love. Perform one act, then journal on the experience. We will gather together after Easter for a community dinner to share how these acts can and did impact your life for the future. You are encouraged to continue your journaling for the whole 40 days of Lent.

Seeking: Honest Questions for Deeper Faith – Daily Devotional Cards for Lent: Beginning with Ash Wednesday and continuing through the first few days of Easter, use these daily devotional cards to expand and deepen your spiritual walk through Lent. Each card has a daily question and a prayer. Day by day, may these prayers remind you that as you seek God, God is always seeking you.



Join the men of St. Alban's Tuesday, Feb. 13 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. as we empty our larders in preparation for Lent

at our annual Shrove Tuesday pancake supper! Men of St. Alban's, we need your help. Please contact Kayn Michels, kaynmichels@yahoo.com, if you can help with providing the ingredients for the meal or making pancakes for our church family and community. Bouquets of flowers will be available for sale for anyone needing that last minute gift for your valentine!



Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, falls on Feb. 14 – Valentine's Day. We are offering two in-person services: 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. We will livestream our 6:30 p.m. service to our YouTube channel. During this service, you will be invited to observe a Holy Lent through self-examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting, self-denial, and by reading and meditation on God's Holy Word. Through these practices, we draw near to Jesus Christ and become like him.

Ashes to Go Join Fr. Bill and the pastors of Bethel Lutheran and First United Methodist at 1:30 p.m. on Ash Wednesday as we take to the streets to offer passersby the outward and visible symbol of penitence. The ashes we receive are to remind us throughout the day of our need for God, and of God's call to us. Please let Fr. Bill know if you wish to help.