

2019

Lenten Devotionals on the
Sermon on the Mount



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Matthew 5:1-2

Jesus' greatest ethical teaching began with seeing. Jesus saw the crowds – for who they were and what they were, in their beauty and blessing as well as their longing and need and fallen humanity. So Jesus went up on a mountainside, where, in Matthew's Gospel, God-events happen. Jesus sat, taking the posture assumed by a rabbi. Jesus' disciples came to him, and Jesus began to instruct them about living toward a sacred openness before God.

Oh how I long to live into a sacred openness before God!

How marvelous it would be to walk to the beat of God-rhythms;

how wondrous to experience immersion into God-life.

And yet how rare.

For too prone I am to the loud gong of social media;

too easily distracted by the clanging cymbals of my own busyness;

how I long to invest in that which is life giving!

So why do I resist?

Give me ears to hear what you have to teach, Lord.

Give me eyes to see as Jesus saw: fallen humanity in their beauty.

Give me a heart opening to your sacred presence in every breath.

Lord, make me a vessel crafted to hold sacred openness,
where fallen humanity is found, let me forgive,
where broken humanity is encountered, let me heal,
where I am the fallen and the broken, let me cry out to you.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
my own wisdom as your ways,
my own knowledge as your guidance,
my own direction as your discernment.

For it is in accepting wisdom from above that we live as blessed below,
it is in offering my life to others that I find your life within,
it is in living the Way of Jesus that sacred openness is discovered.

²⁷ Scylla and Charybdis were two immortal dangers through which Ulysses sailed in the Odyssey. It roughly means “between a rock and a hard place.”

²⁸ c.f. James 1:17.

²⁹ c.f. Romans 12:2 where God’s will is described as “good, pleasing and just.”

³⁰ “Cruciform” refers to the manner of the Cross – the way of self-giving ethics and spirituality.

³¹ c.f. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25: “For the Cross is the power of God unto salvation.”

³² c.f. Galatians 2:20.

Go into the world... Notice your receptivity to others. Are you available to listen, to hear, to respond in ways that connect? Or are you focused inward, shut off from listening, ready to interrupt? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:3

“Sacred openness is given as gift to the poor in spirit, not full of themselves but longing for that which is from above; the way of deep immersion into God-life will be embodied in them.”

Open yourself to fresh desire.

*See the beauty from above that lives within and without,
before and behind and between.*

*The beauty whispers for you to come, to receive
the gift intended for you from before Creation saw its first light,
a gift so precious that it can belong to no other:*

your name written upon God’s heart.

Oh, to be sure, there are other gifts and other names written on God’s heart.

Do not begin to imagine you are the only one!

*Rather open yourself to the delight that your lack of specialness makes you
so much more –*

sharing in a humanity of God’s naming.

Now descend into the eternal embrace of love.

Lord, make me poor in spirit,
when too full, let me be poured out,
when too proud, let me choose humility,
when grasping for my own sake, let me be spent in compassion.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to live for my own gain as to love with joyful generosity,
to trust in my strength as to accept my belovedness,
to think I know best as to trust you know better.

For the act of *kenosis*¹ - of emptying – is the model of Jesus,
the giving of self the Way of the Cross that leads to eternal life.

Go into the world... Notice your willingness to accept others' influence. Do you welcome help or advice? How easily do you acknowledge and affirm others' knowledge and expertise? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:4

“Sacred openness is given as gift to those who lament life's cruelty, suffering and tragedy; the presence of God will shine upon them.”

Brokenness can be a gift.

*Opening the soul, brokenness becomes the sign of understanding,
comprehension that mourning and lament embrace the truth –
there is darkness in this world.*

The cry of a heart longing for God,

*lament transforms the suffering of this world into
a window that looks out upon God-desired shalom.*

Those who lament see reality as it is: in need of the Refiner's Fire.

*So easy is it to fall into the trap of “Goodness + Riches = Blessing,”
but lament names the trap for what it is: heresy.*

Mourning and lament embrace beauty, wholeness, and joy

more fully than does empty blessing –

and the presence of God shines upon the cry of the heart.

Lord, make me an instrument of holy lament,
where there are wounds in self or others, let me feel their depths,
where injustice reigns, let me stand angry and observant,
where raw is the soul, let me speak righteous fury into the world.

God of the Cross, may I not so much seek
to avoid pain as to embrace its reality and welcome its truth,
to affirm life as to mourn death in all its forms,
to silence lament as to join my voice with the great company of saints.

For the wounded healer's balm is in Golgotha,
and cruciform discipleship² the Way of Jesus.

⁹ c.f. Matthew 25:21.

¹⁰ *Torah* is the Hebrew word translated as “Law” and means both the rules of the Law as well as the narrative proclamation of God's love.

¹¹ This opening triplet is taken from John Calvin's “Three Uses of the Law,” in which Calvin argued the Law's purpose was to lead one toward repentance, to lead one toward a true understanding of oneself (as if looking into a mirror), and to lead one toward holiness. My use of “dread and delight” in the first of the three lines is an expansion upon Calvin, as the Law does more than merely show us our sin, (poetically described as “dread”), but also, as Jewish spirituality argues, can itself be a delight.

¹² c.f. 1 John 3:2. The verse does not connect perfectly, but there is a sense in which obedience to Christ's Law is one means of discerning and discovering, of “seeing,” the face of Jesus.

¹³ *Imago dei* means “image of God” (c.f. Genesis 1:27).

¹⁴ Micro-aggressions are slights or snubs, verbal or non-verbal, intentional or non-intentional, that communicate one person is less valuable than another.

¹⁵ From before the beginning of time, we have been known, chosen, and called by name: the beloved of God!

¹⁶ Transactional refers to “what can you give me?” while relational appreciates others as they are rather than “How can you benefit me?”

¹⁷ c.f. James 3, especially verses 9-10 and 17.

¹⁸ Prevaricate (verb): to speak or act in an evasive way. Synonyms: beat around the bush, hedge, waffle.

¹⁹ c.f. Ephesians 4:15.

²⁰ c.f. Mark 10:45.

²¹ c.f. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

²² In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote that “When Christ calls a [person], he bids [them] come and die.”

²³ Regarding his non-violent opposition to the Jim Crow laws in the southern states, Dr. King famously wrote, “We will match their ability to hate with our ability to love so that when we win we shall win a double victory, for we will not only have achieved our political aims but will have won their hearts as well.”

²⁴ c.f. Philippians 4:13

²⁵ *Abba* and *Imma* mean “Dad” and “Mom” and are, roughly equivalent to how a child might have spoken to a parent.

²⁶ c.f. 1 Corinthians 13:12 and 1 John 3:2.

ABOUT SACRED OPENNESS

Copies of this devotional book can be found on the de Cristo and Grand Canyon websites at the following links:

<https://pbygrandcanyon.org/lenten-devotions-by-brad-munroe/>

<https://presbyterydecristo.org/2019/01/08/lenten-devotions-by-brad-munroe/>

As is customary within the two presbyteries, the documents are the same, as Munroe and the rest of the shared presbytery staff love each of their presbyteries equally. 😊

PERMISSIONS

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¹ *Kenosis* is a Greek word that means “emptying.” It is used most famously in the New Testament in Philippians 2:7 (c.f. “made himself nothing” NIV) to describe Jesus’ emptying of his divine prerogatives to embrace the form of a servant.

² Cruciform is a theological way to say, “formed by the cross,” or “being shaped and guided by the cross.” Often our modern discipleship ignores, evades, and even rejects “cruciform discipleship” (e.g. the prosperity gospel), but it is, historically, the Way of Jesus for the majority of Christians

³ These lines are taken from the Heidelberg Catechism: question and answer #1.

⁴ A reference to Psalm 121:1-2, “I lift my eyes to the hills; from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth.”

⁵ This quote is attributed to the writer Flannery O’Connor, citation unknown.

⁶ c.f. 1 Corinthians 1:18.

⁷ C.f. Luke 18:1-5.

⁸ Holy is defined as “set apart” for God and God’s purposes.

Go into the world... Notice the presence of suffering in the world and your response to it. Do you avoid its lament? Steel yourself against it? Embrace it for a time only, eventually to look away? Experiment with crying out against injustice and suffering in the world through your prayers. What impact does such prayer have upon your soul? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:5

“Sacred openness is given as gift to those able to let go and let God; in refusing to grasp they are able to receive, and the earth itself receives them.”

*Like grasping smoke is my folly
that I own, manipulate, control
things and people.*

*Society and culture whisper contempt at the notion things and people are not for sale,
yet we cannot escape the truth –
we are not able, we do not, cannot
control, manipulate, own anything but
our own willingness and openness –
the Wind of God blowing through our soul to whisper affirmation that
we are Beloved.*

And all is gift for those ready to receive.

*Grasp smoke or grasp the gift –
but I cannot do both.*

Lord, make me an instrument of acceptance,
when tempted to reach out and grab, let me breathe in,
when tempted to take for myself, let me breathe out,
when tempted to claim what’s rightfully mine, let me shrug a holy shrug
(and keep breathing, always breathing).

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to be aware of what belongs to me as that it all belongs to you,
to fight for my rights as to lift up human rights,
to fulfill my personal destiny as to be open to your eternity.

For in body and in soul, in life and in death and in life beyond death,
I belong not to myself but to you, my faithful savior,³
and in this truth, I find peace.

Go into the world... Notice your desire to control people and circumstances. How often do you excuse yourself when interrupting another? How comfortable are you when not in charge? Notice one opportunity today to let go and let another step forward. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:6

“Sacred openness is given as gift to those who hunger for justice and thirst for shalom; they will be sated by the goodness of God.”

*Palpable yearning,
pain no balm can salve,
only the emptiness of longing for justice too long denied,
only the bitter weeping of shalom shattered
like a broken mirror that once reflected the way we were intended to be.
So is the longing of the heart amidst God's people.
The moral arc of history may bend toward justice,
but the arc is too long, too filled with despair and unrequited hope.
“How long, O Lord, shall you forget us forever?”
Yet to the justice-starved soul and the shalom-parched spirit is fed
that which alone sustains: the goodness of God.
“Taste and see, the Lord is good.”
Feeding the soul for perseverance,
quenching the spirit beyond filling,
reviving hope among the dead,
calling into being that which is not but will be.*

Lord, make me and instrument hungry for justice,
when justice is delayed, may it cause me pain,
when justice is denied, may it feed my righteous anger,
wherever injustice is found, may I speak truth to power.

*warnings of our own hypocrisy before all else,
actions speaking louder than words.
Imagine the moment: a revolution begun in the whisper heard round the world.
Work just beginning,
lepers to touch and Gentiles to bless,
powers to confront and principalities to overcome,
a Cross to bear and an Empty Tomb to unveil,
women to send (and men, too).
Imagine the moment: You. Me. Us.
We better get moving.*

Lord, make me an instrument of this sermon,
when tempted to forget, let me remember its teaching,
when discouraged, let me recall its power,
when fearing it asks too much, let me pray to the One who gave it.
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to be blessed as to be a blessing,
to live for self as to live with sacred openness before you and all,
to long for the good life as to long for eternal life
freely given through Jesus Christ.

Go into the world... Notice opportunities to speak truth in love. Notice and speak with integrity, with simplicity to the extent possible, and always with love. How does it feel? Do you resist or are you motivated by speaking? Notice. Pray. Act.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*Foolish the focus on immediacy, for a capricious tyrant is he:
reveling in success that cannot last,
unconcerned about character,
oblivious to the beauty of a life shaped by holy devotion,
as if the Grand Canyon was formed in a day.*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy obedience,
where I delight in small acts of devotion or service,
where I find meaning in a life given for others,
where I discover joy in our shared humanity with all.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to create the American Dream as to live toward your calling for my life,
to build a better life as to build a more honest one,
to worship the here-and-now as to journey toward a holy horizon.

For too easily is my faith shaped by political values,
too often is my faith formed by economic interests,
but you call me to live the Way of Jesus: daily, hourly, breath by breath.

Go into the world... Notice your acceptance of – or resistance to – Jesus’
calling and commandments. Do you delight in obedience? Are there
certain people or circumstances that habitually elicit resistance? If so,
wrestle with God about them through prayer. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 7:28-29

Jesus’ teaching was whole and complete, and the people were in
awe at what they had just heard. Jesus spoke like one who is Lord over
the Law, as if the Law itself belonged to him. No quotations of others.
No cross-references. No lawyerly manipulation. Jesus spoke not as one
who served the Law but as one for whom the Law was servant.

*Imagine the moment: clarity spoken with love to a motley crew.
Turning upside-down and inside-out the meaning of blessing,
never again assuming our own purity,
justice reaching across cultures and beyond personal benefit,*

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to care about me and mine as to care about all,
to consider my clan as better as to claim we are all one humanity,
to rise above others as to lower myself, and, like Jesus, wash their feet.
For the life of the disciple is a plural reality – together, not alone,
learning the depth to which we all share the same planet,
and you the Lord of all.

Go into the world... Notice those whom Jesus called “the least of these.”
How often during your day do you encounter these children of God?
How well do you notice and see them? Notice and hear them? Notice
they share with you a common humanity? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:7

“Sacred openness is given as gift to those who respond with
compassion to the deep brokenness of humanity; as they offer renewal of
friendship to others – mercy – so they open themselves to receiving the
same.”

*“Mercy! Mercy!” cried the old, Southern grandmother,
as she looked upon a child without guile, a lost innocent in need of a shepherd.
Mercy, to this grandmother, is invitation
to care, to love, to protect, to endure,
to remain open in heart and mind, spirit and soul
to the gift of the child before her.*

*So is God’s mercy toward us
gift and invitation.*

*How blessed are those whose hearts can remain open
when media pulse invites anger, hatred, and despair,
when civility and kindness are laid to rest by a world that knows not God,
and by a Church that does know yet acts in the same ways.*

Lord, have mercy upon us!

Christ, have mercy upon us!

Lord, have mercy upon us!

Lord, make me an instrument of mercy,
where there is brokenness, let me tend to wounds,
where there is rupture, let me envelop with love,
whenever needed, let me offer your kindness.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to claim my goodness as to offer your grace,
to play the “gotcha” game, as to learn a new game,
to have to be right as to want to be in right relations.

For it is your mercy that touches the soul,
it is your compassion that transforms the spirit,
it is your love, at work through us, that mends broken hearts.

Go into the world... Notice hurt. In self and in others, notice the ways we hide and are honest about our hurt. Does your hurt lead you to greater honesty and integrity or detour you toward destructive responses toward others? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:8

“Sacred openness is given as gift to those whose longing is for God and only God; their eyes will see all things, including God’s very self, through the lens of faith.”

Vision can be a tricky thing.

What we see is not always what we get:

affluenza an illusion,

control an absurdity,

sex appeal a funhouse mirror.

Too easily does our vision distort;

too often does our vision blind.

Yet to those with eyes willing to look upon the

broken

and see the scars, look upon the

hungry

Lord, make me an instrument of righteousness,
while talking the talk, let me walk the walk,
while owning my actions, let me also examine them,
while believing, let me become.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to revel in the title “Christian” as to be found in Christ,
to look the part as to live the path,

to say, “Lord, Lord” as to hear my name be called, “Beloved child.”
For easily flow the words of faith, but I aspire to live the deeper rhythms
where salt preserves and light shines,
and the truth of my being is revealed to all.

Go into the world... Notice your “God-talk.” Does what you say about yourself conform to how you act toward others? Toward the values you live and the goals you pursue? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 7:24-27

“Wise folk practice what I preach, for they are people of obedient faith. The wise are like those who build toward the horizon, toward that which endures, upon solid foundations, deep into the bedrock. When trouble comes, and trouble always comes, the wise are confident their house will remain upright, whole, and complete. Not so the fool. The fool hears my commands and considers them suggestions; thinks my teaching is an invitation to a debate. The fool is like those who slap a shed together with a few 2 x 4’s and a tarp. When the storm comes that shed never lasts. All that is left are splinters and regret.”

A long obedience in a common direction is the journey of the faithful.

Measured in character not material,

each action the result of a decision,

each decision the result of a choice,

each choice an opportunity to proclaim, “Jesus is Lord.”

Difficult work making Jesus Lord – difficult but valuable,

and worth every scar, every wrinkle, every tear shed in laughter or in sorrow.

to be lauded as to be found living your justice,
to gather crowds as to spread gospel seeds of faith, hope, and love.

For bigger is not necessarily better in the ways of faith,
but deeper always finds beauty and mystery,
and truth leads to communion, community, and compassion.

Go into the world... Notice your fruit. Assume your intentions are pure and notice the fruit of your attitudes and actions. Does your life produce sweetness and joy in those around you? If not, your assumption may need to be reexamined. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 7:21-23

“Talk’s cheap! Calling yourself a Christian is not the same as living according to the rule of God’s Sovereign love. Only those who let their lives do the talking are true Christ followers. Many will say on the Day of the Lord, ‘Hey, Jesus, get a load of me! I claimed the right to judge others in your name. I protected my own self-interest and alleged I was doing your will. I had both power and privilege and gave you credit for both.’ I will look these people in the eye when I say, “I don’t know you. Never did. You need to go your own way now, do your own thing, just like you’ve always done.”

I worry about myself (true confession), for I am a wordsmith.

Lover of words that I am, what will become of me?

Reading and writing, speaking and (at times) listening, I make my living with words.

So easy it is to say, “Lord, Lord!”

But Gospel calls to a deeper Way, beyond the wordiness that clutters my soul.

I hear Jesus calling me beyond my words, beyond even doing,

toward immersion into being, becoming, breathing

Spirit’s call to long, to love, to live

according to the rule of God’s Sovereign love,

to encounter and be encountered, to be known and then to know, until

“It is not I who lives but Christ who lives in me.”³²

and see the heaving chest, look upon the

thirsty

and see the blood shed for all,

to them is given vision transcendent,

longing of mystics and comfort of oppressed,

home.

Lord, make me an instrument of divine vision,
when tempted to see only the surface, focus my gaze upon the depths,
when tempted with the flesh, oblige me to listen for Spirit whisper,
when tempted with only here and only now, lift my eyes to the hills.⁴

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to languish in deadening activities as to learn the ways of your life anew,
to long for the things of this world as to live your life abundant,
to look for what might be as to be loved unto eternal life.

For in the Creator’s love I am chosen,
in the Son’s love I am redeemed,
in the Spirit’s power I am being molded into the image of a holy life.

Go into the world... Notice the opportunities to focus deeper during your day. How often do you grasp opportunities to look at people and situations through the lens of faith? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:9

“Sacred openness is given as gift to those whose methods conform to God’s Way – making peace; they will be known as children after God’s own heart.”

There is madness in God’s method.

Crazy the one

who loves enemy and prays for one’s own persecutors;

who forgives seven times seventy and again from the Cross;

who pays the last as if they were first.

The poet was right,

“You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you odd.”⁵

Better a child after God’s own heart in the way of shalom

than gigolo for Power, Arrogance, and Control.

Better to grasp less and give more

than lose one’s soul in a game not of our own making we cannot win.

Better to limp in the way of peace

than to sprint into the arms of Death.

And they say I’m the madman?

Lord, make me an instrument of foolishness,
where others bow to power, may I lift up the weak,
where others let money talk, may I know the true value of a soul,
where others judge on merit, may I shower others with grace.
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to hold power over others as to share privilege with all,
to control the process as to create fair means,
to be the alpha as to bow before the One who is Alpha and Omega.
For the message of the cross is foolishness to those perishing,
but to us who are being saved
it is the power of God.⁶

Go into the world... Notice the peacemakers in your life. Who creates peace?
What attitudes and actions lead to their ability to create peace? Might you
adopt one of these attitudes or actions in your own life? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:10

“Sacred openness is given as gift to those who suffer at the hands
of others in their pursuit of right relationships among all people; the way
of deep immersion into God-life will be embodied in them.”

Life is a contact sport.

*Bumps and bruises come with caring to engage with another in the dance of
truth and joy and love and justice.*

Go into the world... Notice power, control and decision-making. Who has
it (and who does not)? How do you seek it (and shun it)? Are you using
your power, control and decision-making as a weapon to get your way
(and how would those around you answer this question)? Notice. Pray.
Act.

Matthew 7:15-20

“Beware fake news! Religious garb is no guarantor of truth. Many
are they who smile only to hide a mouth full of malice and a heart
hardened by hate. Do you want to know what’s in another’s heart? Look
at their fruit. A cactus is prickly, and a great oak provides shade. Expect
flavorful oranges from trees in Florida not North Dakota. Likewise, rich,
maple syrup comes from the tree in Vermont not Arizona. A tree’s bark
may look fine but if the wood within is infested with beetles, the tree is as
good as dead – cut it down and use it to keep warm in the winter. Good
or bad, ripe or rotten, you can tell a tree by its fruit.”

Ravenous the wolf that devours the sheep.

Guile feasting on goodness,

preying on innocence,

manipulating virtue for its own narcissism.

Beware, beware, again I say beware.

Humility and gentleness are difficult to fake;

vulnerability and authenticity harder still.

When you encounter these in another you sense shalom.

It’s hard to fake shalom.

Lord, make me a vessel full of good fruit,
where wolves feast, let me protect the sheep,
where preachers lie, let me prophesy destruction,
where religion becomes the opiate, let me invoke redemptive judgment.
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to be liked as to be found living your truth,

Go into the world... Notice your interactions. Do you tend to give or take, to expect more and offer less or do you see each encounter as open to wonder, mystery and blessing? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 7:13-14

“The rule of God’s Sovereign love is not for the faint of heart! The crowds are loud and stampede their way down the highway to ruin. Smaller and more discreet, almost unseen, is the path that leads to God-life: few are willing to seek it and fewer still are willing to walk it.”

Media shouts and Twitter storms abound.

Rheostat of chaos surging past my ears.

Glitz, glamour and gore invade my eyes.

Winners and losers vie for bandwidth in a zero-sum game.

Might makes right and to the Victors go the spoils!

In such a world, who has ears to hear the whisper of the Way?

Peace to one’s enemies: radical and open and vulnerable.

Forgiveness that renounces retribution for a deeper, abiding wholeness.

Humility that relinquishes rights and renounces power.

What kind of fool would sign up for this?

Only a fool for Christ!

Lord, make of me a holy fool,
when invited to power, willing to hold less that we all may gain more,
when enticed by control, able to share with others in mutual submission,
when wooed by the world’s glory and renown, shunning its allure.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to walk the wide path as to discover the narrow Way,
to travel with multitudes as to journey with pilgrims,
to accept the “way things are” as to work for how they should be.

For the serpent is ever-present,
pointing toward the easy path that denies the Cross,
that sees failure and not the power of God.³¹

Wrinkles and scars come to all, but beautiful are they who received them because they loved without measure.

God is in them in ways that whisper of glory and challenge our assumptions of the good life.

Swan dive into the God-life, O Seeker, by living in the direction of shalom but beware

not everyone will applaud you.

Lord, make me an instrument of holy connection,
when others shy away, let me gently pursue,
when others shout aloud, let me hear what is behind their words,
when others build walls, let me build bridges.
O Divine Master may I not so much seek
to divide as to unite,
to reject as to embrace,
to wound as to heal.
For divisiveness is the way of the world and division its unholy fruit,
but you, O Lord, call us to a
different Way, a common Truth, and a shared Life in Christ Jesus.

Go into the world... Notice ways you are open to – or closed off from – connection with others. What leads you toward openness? When and how do you close yourself to others? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:11-12

“Sacred openness is given as gift to you when others abuse, berate and censure you because you belong to me. Abusing, Berating and Censure are the ABCs of evil – power wielded to control. Great joy and gladness should be yours when this happens, for it means you are walking the way of God’s truth-tellers from ages to ages past. When this happens, know that you are immersed deeply in the rule of God’s Sovereign love.”

Stiff the wind that slays the mighty oak yet spares the willow.

It is not the fierceness of evil but the one that endures who is saved, for

*joy comes not in the absence of evil but in its overcoming.
The way of believing is the path of walking, always walking,
in the direction of shalom,
ignoring the powers,
standing against the principalities,
inspired only by the call to
live into the rule of the love that forms the core of the universe and
guides its every breath.*

Lord, make me a resilient vessel,
when provoked, let me persevere,
when tested, let me triumph o'er my enemies,
when others go low, let me go high.
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to grow immediately as to grow steadily,
to never break as to be open to repair,
to avoid evil as to outlast it.
For it is patient faith that endures,
it is humble faith that ambles toward holiness,
it is the persistent widow who convinces the dishonest Judge.⁷

Go into the world... Notice temptations to shrink, invitations to shrivel, the many, varied, and ever-evolving ways others seek to stifle your living with integrity. Whose voice is most powerful in your ear? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:13-16

“You are salt: preserving good and even intensifying it. Do not lose your saltiness, for nothing tastes worse than bland faith. You are light: shining God’s love into darkness, illuminating the Way to live immersed in the rule of God’s Sovereign love. Do not hide your light; a burned-out candle helps no one. Instead, let your light shine before others that your very life – your courage and compassion, your commitment to justice and unconquerable joy – may lead others to sing the Heavenly One’s praise.”

or the farmer’s market red you bought that morning? If he asks for salmon do you serve ten-day old, leftover chicken nuggets? Compared to God your heart is filled with deception and darkness, and yet you desire to shine light upon your children and share your love with them. If you, broken vessel though you are, desire to give good gifts to your children, how much more will God lavish grace, mercy and peace upon God’s beloved? This is the Golden Rule: do to others what you would have them do to you – this is the fulfillment, the completion, the wholeness of the Law and the Prophets.”

*How precious it was to hold my daughter, my son, newborns in my arms –
what would I not give to protect and to provide for them?
How desperate the worry when injury or illness would come;
how palpable the fear for my offspring in a world of drugs, gangs, mental illness, suicide.
Oh, Lord, care for my babies!
How much more...
God’s love, God’s grace?
How much more...
God’s mercy, God’s forbearance?
How much more...
lavish the love that overflows the banks of God’s river,
flooding hearts, firing imaginations, filling minds with wonder?*

Lord, make me an instrument of the golden rule,
when confronting injustice, let me act with integrity,
when challenged by bias, let me respond with equity,
when provoked to arms, let me offer a path to peace.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to trust in my own abilities as to entrust myself to your mercies,
to rest on my laurels as to dive head-long into your grace,
to respond in kind as to live a cruciform life.³⁰

For God-life lives beyond mere transaction
to become open to a holy transformation
that alone is worthy of the name golden.

And yet.

O that I longed for others to receive what I desire for myself.

O that my heart pounded, yearned, pleaded on behalf of the least and the lost.

O that I would beseech you, O Lord,

when the kingdom does not come,

when your will is not done,

not on earth as it is in heaven – not even close.

Help me long, keep longing, and expand the breadth of my longing.

Help me yearn, keep yearning, and expand the depth of my yearning.

*Help me beseech you, O Lord, not only for me and mine but for the sake of
the kingdom – your kingdom,*

that heaven and earth may be one.

Lord, make me an instrument of holy yearning,

when faith gasps, may I breathe and breathe and breath again,

when hope shrivels, may the winds of your will swell in my soul,

when love suffers loss, may your Spirit make it gain.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek

to find my own gain as to learn of your good,

to demand what is rightly mine as to discover what is of your justice,

to always seek pleasure as to be sated by that which is pleasing to you.²⁹

For your divine will is *shalom*:

more than an absence of conflict,

the active presence of wholeness, harmony, and peace.

Go into the world... Notice your yearnings. Are your desires triggered by simple biology or savvy marketing? By cultural expectation or deep, spiritual longing? Do you recognize God-yearnings when they appear? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 7:9-12

“Suppose one of your children is hungry. If she asks for an apple, do you give the fake, plastic apple from the dining room table centerpiece,

LET.

Not try, not struggle, not work at –

“If at first you don’t succeed....”

Simply be.

Breathe with Jesus.

Notice and follow the Spirit-led urges.

LET.

Nothing heroic, nothing miraculous –

“If you REALLY loved Jesus, then....”

Already present.

Dawning from within (and above).

Be who you are.

LET.

For others are waiting.

Others are longing.

Others need.

For us to be salt. For us to shine light.

To live the Way of God’s Sovereign love.

LET.

Lord, make me salt and light,

when invited to live a bland faith, let me choose zest,

when invited to hide in darkness, let me choose light,

when invited to embrace absence, silence and deafness,

let me choose speaking and acting upon the Word I have heard.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek

to live a safe life as a sacred faith,

to live always happy as to live always holy,⁸

to live for gratification but so you are well-pleased.⁹

For this world is in need of courage and compassion
from those committed to lives of justice and unconquerable joy
that leads all creation to sing your praise.

Go into the world... Notice resistance. Notice the subtle, internal, almost imperceptible resistance that prevents you from being salt and light. What holds you back from being what – and who – you are? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:17-20

“I have not come to release others from the crook of Law or the cord of Prophet truth; I have come to embody them in myself. Truth I speak: even after the end of all things, the tiniest dot of the “i” and cross of the “t” will remain in the Law until its fullness is embodied in me. Indeed, even the tiniest fracture with the least of the Law is like a complete break; to teach others to allow even a fracture is to volunteer for the last seat among the rule of God’s Sovereign love, but to obey step by step, modest intent upon meager act, to follow ever deeper into the God-life is to be called a hero among those who live within the rule of God’s Sovereign love. Truth I speak: you must move beyond image to character, beyond style to substance, beyond talk to living into the fullness of God’s Way.”

Hard, cold, distant,

*without mercy, without nuance, without a soul,
the Law – from the outside looking in.*

Full, warm, cherished,

*with grace to offer, mysterious complexity, a healing touch,
the Law – from the inside looking out.*

Regal, intimate, embodiment,

*embodied heart, living soul, filled with sorrow and joy,
Jesus – Torah Fulfilled.¹⁰*

Lord, make me an instrument of Torah fulfilled,
in its following, may I find both dread and delight,¹¹
in its statutes, may I look upon my true self as in a perfect mirror,
in its following, may I discover the path of God’s guidance for my life.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to skirt around the Law as to discern its heart,
to blindly obey as to discover its joy,

Lord, make me a vessel of the sacred,
where others forget, let me remember there is mystery beyond,
where others neglect, let me treat with honor and tenderness,
where others scoff, let me bend my knees and become whole again.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to walk to world-rhythms as to dance God-rhythms,
to take the road more traveled as to journey where I am called,
to look good to others as to immerse into the depths of your goodness.

For deep is the mystery of faith:
Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again,
and in Christ all things hold together, including you and including me,
but also “the Other” for whom the sacred is not yet a living Word.

Go into the world... Notice where God shows up. Assume, perhaps only for this day but at least for this entire day, that Christian theology portrays reality accurately: God is all around. Where do you hear God-whispers? When do you see God-hints? Wherever and whenever be thankful, for you are standing on holy ground. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 7:7-8

“Ask and keep on asking – you’ll get what God intends for you. Search and seek, seek and search – God will show you what you need to find. Knock and keep on knocking – don’t stop knocking. Ever. The door to God’s kingdom will be opened for you. Everyone who asks for what is in God’s will, will receive. You who search and seek for that which is pleasing and just before the Lord, will find exactly what God intends for you to discover. The door marked ‘God’s grace is found here’ will be opened to anyone who knocks.”

Longing, longing, longing.

Heart pounding, yearning, pleading.

*I have come to understand the meaning of that most King Jamesian of words:
beseech.*

My soul thirsts for thee, O Lord,

my human spirit finds rest in the comfort of your Holy Spirit.

when deaf to cries of desperation, let me hear whispers of hope,
when mute before multiple evils, let me discover my voice.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to correct others as to be honest about myself,
to prevent others' sins as to own up to my own sinfulness,
to judge as to confess.

For the way of freedom is found in the truth that
I am not OK and you are not OK,
but we are all alright in Christ Jesus our Savior.

Go into the world... Notice the *location* of your focus. Are you merely seeking to look good or actually be good – who, really, are you trying to fool? Give yourself permission to choose freedom by owning up to your own brokenness and then live according to holy values. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 7:6

“Guard the holy. Protect the sacred. Don't let rabid dogs bury the sacred like a bone. Do you see pigs rolling in the mud? Don't join them in the pit with that which is holy. The first victims will be the holy and the sacred, and you'll be close to follow.”

*Holy the bread of heaven and sacred the cup of salvation
poured out into the life of the world though
when the cup leaks, and it will leak,
what drips is not beauty but simply Welch's,
staining the shroud that covers the table intended to lead to mystery,
but which too often is just a table.
Too easily do moments intended to lead beyond the thin veil become through
ignorance or indolence
moments that pass, are missed, or worse:
distorted into something hateful –
I'm looking at you, Charlottesville.
I'm looking at you, Church Argument about the Color of the Carpet.
I'm looking at me:
too often and too easily.*

to obey because I have to as to obey because I get to.

For the obedience of faith is a path of transformation
measured by eternity and leading one to become like Christ,
for in the obedience of faith we see Him as He really is.¹²

Go into the world... Notice your resistance to – and acceptance of – God's Law. Is there a pattern to your easy obedience or to your difficult duty? When is Law easy? When is Law hard? Is it about the Law – or you? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:21-26

“From age to age it has been taught, ‘Murder someone and you will be judged.’ But I take it further: even anger is a kind of murder; to degrade another a form of killing. To call your brother or sister a ‘Fool!’ is to invite the fires of purification, for surely you are missing the grace of offering life to one another. Life shared in friendship is among the greatest gifts we can give. Indeed, if you are giving a gift to God but remember someone whom you have injured, set aside the gift to God until you get right with your brother or sister. God will still be there to receive your gift. Even treat the civil courts as a motive for reconciliation; get straight early, before matters get out of hand, before just judgment is placed upon you. Truth I speak: human judgment has not the mercy of God's grace.”

*The Dance of Trinity love,
fellowship of the Divine Communion,
created in this image are we!
Yet broken, too,
refusing community, turning from compassion,
needing redemption and refusing reconciliation.
Releasing anger we open ourselves to renewal,
offering grace we live into our becoming:
God restoring imago dei¹³
within and between,
to and for,
self, others and creation.*

Lord, make me an instrument of love,
where there is hatred, let me sow healing,
where there is division, let me restore friendship,
where there is betrayal, let me build trust.
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek
to live the ways of the world as to follow the Way of Jesus,
to act in same kind as to choose to act in kindness,
to want to get even as to desire, eventually, to get right with others.

For the Way of Jesus is counter-cultural
and I am constantly tempted to ignore its beauty,
but with your help I am living toward my own becoming.

Go into the world... Notice micro-aggressions¹⁴ today. How many do you inflict upon others? How often do others inflict them upon you? And when so inflicted – by self or other – what is your response to them? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:27-30

“From age to age it has been taught, ‘Be faithful to one’s spouse; no hanky-panky of thought, word or deed.’ But I take it further: to lust after a woman is to seek to degrade her, to diminish the God-light within her, treat her as nothing more than a toy for your pleasure. This distorts your heart and is not worth the heartache it brings. If anything causes brokenness and sin – your eye or your hand, for example, the winsome sparkle of things or your desire to possess them – clean house! Control your environment, if you must; protect yourself from those things that cause you to fall. It is better to limit a part of your life than to let your whole person be distorted into something gruesome; in the great purification, only your true self will remain.”

Beauty?

*So fragile and fleeting,
the wind stirs and it fades.*

to be forgiven as to forgive,
to receive mercy as to offer mercy,
to expect of others as to ask of myself.
For in you, with you, through you
we are blessed
to be a blessing.

Go into the world... Notice your inner critic. At whom are his or her barbs targeted? You? Others? The helpless and defenseless? The last, the least, and the lost? Choose to bless – find a way to bless whoever is targeted by your inner critic. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 7:3-5

“It is so much easier to look out the window at a friend’s sin than in the mirror at your own. Or again, it’s easier to criticize another for the dollop of mustard on the side of their mouth than to be aware of your own status as a complete and utter, disheveled mess. Hypocrite! Deal with your own brokenness before worrying about another’s. Clean up your own act first and then you’ll be able to help others.”

I so love to mansplain.

If only my wife, my children, my co-workers would listen to me!

If only the government would listen to me!

If only I could solve all the problems of the world!

What a perfect place the world would be!

I could live in my own, little, life-bubble,

and no one would ever criticize me,

and I’d never have to look inward nor upward,

and I wouldn’t have to worry about growing, changing, living.

O what a happy, happy life that would be.

Or might it be sad?

Lord, make me a vessel of self-awareness,
when blind to my brokenness, let me see the path toward love,

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to live a life without problems as to live life in your presence,
to be devoid of challenges as to bring them to you,
to never stumble as to learn to walk again by your side.
For the journey is long that leads to eternity,
and your grace accompanies each step,
even those when we sprain our ankles or fall off a cliff.

Go into the world... Notice the distinction between “need” and “want” in your life. Is the boundary between them clearly fenced for you, or a bit mushy? Has entitlement blurred the boundaries between the two, or does an attitude of gratitude permeate your moment-by-moment awareness? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 7:1-2

“Stop judging others! The critic is criticized; the blamer is blamed; harshness begets harshness; and the circle never ends. The measure you use with others bounces back toward you.”

Haters gonna hate!

Polarized politics, social media trolls, church gossips in every age.

Worse still your own inner critic –

the Accuser who appears all-knowing and all-powerful.

Are we condemned to a world, a life, an endless cycle that denies grace?

Is there not a better way?

A way of seeing others according to their imago dei.

A way of allowing others to be blessed.

A way of inviting others into a gentle, humble, life-giving humanity.

The Way of Jesus.

Lord, make me an instrument of the Way,
when afraid, choosing trust,
when wounded, choosing compassion,
when dying, committing my spirit into your hands.
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek

Beauty?

*Distorting, perverting, caricature of blessing,
as purpose, end, or aim.*

Beauty.

Created, given, envisioned for sharing.

Beloved gift.

Lord, make me an instrument of sacred beauty,
where others’ dignity is distorted, let me claim their sacredness,
where others’ worth is devalued, let me honor their giftedness,
where others are valued only for what they can give or do or buy,
let me esteem them for who they are and that they are.

O Divine Master, let me not so much seek

to claim as to appreciate,

to control as to respect,

to possess as to relate.

For it is in relationship with God that we discover our true name,¹⁵
it is in relationship with another that we discover our true humanity,
it is in relationship with all that we discover our true beauty.

Go into the world... Notice the moments you treat others in *transactional* ways versus *relational* ways.¹⁶ How does it feel when you or others relate in these ways? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:31-32

“From age to age it has been taught, ‘Be kind and just when you divorce your wife; give her a fighting chance in this tough, patriarchal world.’ But I take it further: you are not fooling heaven with this divorce gambit. You say to yourself, ‘If I commit adultery – a capital offense – I can be killed, so I will divorce my wife and then can take the woman of my lust; it is perfectly legal.’ Legal is not the same as moral. If you divorce with such trickery your sophistry convinces no one but yourself – certainly not the Eternal One! The only reason for divorce is marriage unfaithfulness; otherwise adultery wins and everyone is stained with sin.”

*Long are the lies we tell ourselves
and God.*

*Convincing no one, really, especially
not God.*

*Still we persist, believing #MeToo doesn't apply to us,
yet God*

is not fooled and will not play the fool.

For God,

fidelity is a gift to be cherished.

In God,

love nurtured deepens over time.

With God,

all things are possible – even this.

Lord, make me an instrument of faithful loving,
when love requires endurance, let me persevere,
when love requires new insight, let me seek your wisdom,
when love stands before me, let me not look to another.

O Divine Master, let me not so much seek
to maximize pleasure as to be pleasing to one another,
to make sex an idol as to enjoy it within its proper bounds,
to seek new partners as to strengthen the connection I already have.

For love deepens over time,
offering a more profound truth, just as beautiful, if different,
and whispering hints of eternity for those who have ears to hear.

Go into the world... Notice faithfulness in yourself and others. What does it feel like when you relate faithfully toward others; not just in marriage but in all relationships? How are you tempted to “little acts of infidelity” in your day to day relationships? Notice. Pray. Act.

For the winds of Spirit blow through our midst,
inviting us to embrace a joy gifted only to those who don't expect it,
yet who receive it as longing, deep longing, and home.

Go into the world... Notice how affected you are by appearance. Do you judge others by their outward cover or the pages within? By their early chapters or the full narrative God is writing of their life? How do you judge yourself? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:31-34

“Fret not about fine food! Fuss not about lavish drinks! Don't be vexed by fancy clothes! Ungodly folk chase these things. The Eternal One knows human need, knows your needs. Choose to allow God's reign of Sovereign love to rule your life; be guided by God-life and God-love in all you do. Food and drink and clothes are built into God's plan for creation, so don't worry about your tomorrows. Focus on today. Each day, including this day, has enough trouble all on its very own.”

Life is complicated.

Fretting and fussing,

vexing and being vexed,

these are the tidal rhythms of humanity.

Yet present in each day and each moment is a choice:

God-life leading to belonging or self-control meandering toward anxious longing?

God's Sovereign love is yesterday, today, and into all tomorrows:

choose each moment in each day

to accept the ebb and flow of human existence, and in so doing,

not to vex nor to be vexed;

not to fuss nor to fret.

It's not all that complicated.

Lord, make me an instrument tranquil to my core,
where others fret and fuss, let me immerse into faith,
where others are vexed, let me cling to the cross of your victory,
where others choose self-determination, let me choose your Sovereignty.

Go into the world... Notice your natural tendency toward worry. Are you a worrywart, or fairly “chillaxed.”? For the worriers among us, learn to breathe, to appreciate the moment, to accept joy. For those who are more naturally *tranquilo*, speak your thanksgiving in the moment of blessing. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:28-30

“Oh, Pilgrim, why do you obsess about your outward appearance to the neglect of your inward beauty? Look! See! Notice! Wildflowers grow, and their beauty is gift rather than toil. Even Solomon, clothed in the best of human glory, was not dressed like the flowers of the field. If God dresses the flowers in beauty, how much more will God clothe you in dignity. Your imagination is too small! Grass withers and flowers fade; all transient beauty is consumed, but your true self, the beautiful part of you, is an everlasting gift from God.”

To those who obsess about outward appearance God says,

“Look! See! Notice! Your stomach consumes and is consumed.”

To those who neglect inward beauty God says,

“Look! See! Notice! I offer a gift that cannot be stolen, nor returned.”

To those whose imagination is too small God says,

“Look! See! Notice! I am doing a new thing.”

Creating, always creating, never ending the beauty, the majesty, the gift of You.

Me.

Us.

Lord, make me one who notices wonder,
not as the world seeks, but as you give,
not of human creation, but of divine grace,
not that which withers, but all that is eternal.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to look a certain way as to be who I am,
to possess prescribed abundance as to fulfill my calling,
to judge based on circumstance as to call all others your beloved.

Matthew 5:33-37

“Again, from age to age it has been taught: ‘Keep your word, especially any promises you make to the Lord.’ But I take it further: Do not make ‘promises’ or say, ‘Cross my heart and hope to die.’ Heaven is not impressed, and the earth does not care. If you say, ‘Stick a needle in my eye,’ do you think that makes your word more trustworthy? Simple truth: humble, unvarnished, spoken in love. If others cannot trust your ‘Yes’ to mean ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ to mean ‘No,’ then you are playing the kind of games the evil one plays.”

The world is filled with the wonder of words,

yet too often and too easily do they lose meaning.

Where are the words that love, that care, that bless?

Playing head games and pontificating,

drawing distinctions and building barriers,

words become the evil one’s playground.

Into my angst it is spoken: a simple yes, a clear no.

Like the air in Spring, my heart is cleansed.

There is hope for the world yet.

Lord, make me an instrument of truth,
where there are falsehoods, let me be honest,
where there is evasion, let me be direct,
where there is manipulation, let me offer the charity of clarity.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to win all arguments as to always say what I mean,
to avoid all “drama” as to always mean what I say,
to “get over” on others as to be who I am – always.

For with the tongue we bless
and with the tongue we curse,
and the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure.¹⁷

Go into the world... Notice the temptation to prevaricate.¹⁸ What tempts you to beat around the bush, to hedge, to waffle? What liberates you to speak the truth in love?¹⁹ Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:38-42

“From age to age it has been taught, ‘Fair is Square,’ ‘Even Steven,’ ‘You take mine, I take yours.’ But I take it further: Do not meet power with force or treachery with manipulation. If a Roman soldier backhands you, essentially treating you like a dog, turn your other cheek to him, inviting him to treat you as his equal. If he demands your shirt, which is his right under Roman law, give up your coat as well, which is illegal for him to take but will place you eye to eye as persons made in God’s image. Don’t allow others to dictate your dignity, for such is theirs only if you give it to them. And if that same Roman soldier forces you to carry his load for one mile, as is his right under Roman law, demand to take it two miles, where that same Roman law will require him to give you just pay for fair work. Share and care, lend and send: your ‘stuff’ does not define your ‘self,’ but your choices do.”

Ghandi: kneeling down he stood tall.

Martin Luther King: fool or Fool for Christ?

A lone student in Tiananmen Square: powerless or all powerful?

Dignity cannot be taken,

only surrendered.

To the cruel we preach compassion,

before the haughty we live humbly.

And though we lose the “battle,” we shall always win the “war”

on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord, make me an instrument of dignity,
when others are judged, let me extend grace,
when others are devalued, let me extend honor,
when others are told they do not matter, let me listen to their story.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to be first as to be last,

your plate and the clothes on your back. Fine dining and fancy clothing do not define you and will not create lasting happiness. Simplicity is blessing. Look to nature where birds fly and crops grow, and the Holy One watches over them in their joy. You are worth much more than even the birds of the air or the crops in the ground, for you are created in God’s image. Will you deny this truth by worrying? How is that working for you?”

Breathe.

*Releasing the tightness in your neck, your chest, and your lower back;
letting go of idolatry to calendar and watch;*

relaxing into the freedom of being beloved of the Holy One.

Breathe.

Acknowledging the temptation to hold your breath;

accepting all the imperfect ways you seek to find happiness;

confessing to God and yourself these cul-de-sacs are not the way of Jesus.

Breathe.

Into becoming the image of God in freedom and love;

toward opening oneself to God-life through community;

finding flight as you plant deep roots in God’s grace, mercy and peace.

Breathe.

Lord, make me an instrument of living trust,
when tense, let me offer my anxiety to you,
when tempted, let me offer my desire to you,
when tested, let me offer my brokenness to you,
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
the world’s routines as to live God-rhythms,
the illusion of control as to learn God-confidence,
the happiness of having as to love what you love.

For every good gift descends from above,²⁸
to invite wholeness and shalom,
God’s justice and joy that cannot be taken away.

*The ship of my heart sails between Scylla and Charybdis,²⁷
ever lured to Power and Prosperity.
These ancient foes wield daily influence, barking commands at my soul;
they belch false promises.
My will is slowly decaying.
There must be a better way.
O Soul, don't listen to these Sirens!
Listen, instead,
to the call of your heart,
to the thirst that causes the deer to pant for water,
to that which Hell's purgation cannot destroy,
to the One who alone is worthy to be called Sovereign.*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy desire,
where some grip, grab and grasp, let me let go,
where others crave prosperity, let me let God,
where material things bark my name, let me be blessedly deaf.
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to gain the world as to grow my soul,
to wield power as to pursue love,
to be all things as to become my truest self.
For the gift of clarity leads to spiritual life,
uniting vision and values, soul and service,
into a beautiful life.

Go into the world... Notice the meaning of money in your life. Is it security? Personal value? What meaning do you assign to things and stuff in your life? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:25-27

“You have heard it said, ‘Let go and let God,’ and I say unto you, ‘Amen and amen.’ Again you have heard it said, ‘Don’t worry. Be happy,’ but I say unto you, ‘Don’t worry. Trust God.’ Trust God for the food on

to assert my privilege as to share it with all,
to be served as to serve.²⁰

For it is for communion with God that we were created,
it is for community with others that we were created,
it is for compassion for all that we are New Creation in Christ Jesus.²¹

Go into the world... Notice the pecking orders around you. Who is elevated? Who is put down? Do you humble yourself or seek primacy? Affirm someone’s dignity today in the way you treat them. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:43-45

“From age to age it has been taught, ‘Love those close to you and hate those who mistreat you.’ But I take it further: Love those who mistreat you – the hostile colleague and the haughty neighbor, the bitter foe and the broken soul. Pray for anyone who seeks your harm; blessing is the Eternal One’s game, and you will want to be a part of his team. The Holy One brings blessing to good and evil alike, to both the just and unjust the Eternal and Holy One sends rain in the desert and sun amidst the snow.”

*August comes in the desert:
 parched soil gulps loudly, greedily, as monsoons overwhelm.
 No one is spared.
 No one desires to be spared this beneficence of God's love,
 for the desert in August is brutal, lethal, soul-withering heat,
 and the violent rains a welcome distraction.
 Or are they a reminder?
 God's love pouring down upon just and unjust alike.
 Upon me and you and them
 until there is only
 us.*

Lord, make me an instrument of blessing,
where others hate, let me love,
where others harm, let me heal,

where others divide and conquer, let me unite and make peace.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to get even with others as to get right with them,
to take an eye for an eye as to offer my heart,
to win at all cost as to walk the way of costly discipleship.²²
For the Rule of God's Sovereign love is not written by Jim Crow
but by Dr. King's double victory,
when both laws and hearts are turned to God in Jesus Christ.²³

Go into the world... Notice being transactional rather than relational. When is it easy to live with *quid pro quo* versus to see every person, each person, as worthy of dignity, love, and respect? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 5:46-48

“If you love only to get love, your soul will wither. Love is not a business transaction but a leap into the unknown, an invitation to surprise, a radical mystery worthy of full exploration. Be like the Eternal and Holy One, who is whole and complete in one's self, yet relishes every chance to be with others.”

*What must it be, this “whole and complete in one's self”?
So needy am I, so prone to worry about others' reactions,
I cannot begin to imagine even as I fantasize what this is like.
Yet open to us all is the gift of
learning, growing, becoming,
so simple the curriculum: straight-forward, no nonsense,
and all the tuition costs for this “school” is
all of me for all of you.
My soul so parched yet your soul so ready;
my hesitancy kisses my hope to conceive within me something beyond me.
Will I love you, whole and complete in yourself?*

Lord, make me an instrument of wholeness,
where others grab, let me give,

*War and Disease and Famine, welcome to my living room!
Addicted to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse I have become.
Where, O Soul, is the beauty that leads to goodness?
How, O my Spirit, can I find the true light,
whose soft glow suggests a gentle warmth,
life-giving in justice, mercy, and truth?
May my believing influence my seeing that light might shine
above and below, around and within and through
you to me to all.*

Lord, make me an instrument of seeing,
where there is beauty, let me notice,
where there is goodness, let me wonder,
Where truth bears fruit, let me express awe.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to look with the eyes of the world as to see the least,
to look through the lens of power as to see the last,
to look for my own causes as to see the lost.
For with eyes open to the Way we heal,
with eyes focused on the Truth we hope,
with eyes filled with light we find Life.

Go into the world... Notice what you notice. Where do you look? What do you read, watch, discuss? Does your thought-life reflect the beauty of God? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:24

“You can only serve one Master. Multi-tasking is a myth, a way to describe chronic distraction. The truth is loyalty is a marriage of integrity and passion and can only be expressed one commitment at a time. Divided loyalties lead to love and hate, especially when the choice is between God and money.”

*I was created,
known before the beginning of time,
chosen in lovingkindness,
the image that alone shapes completeness, wholeness, joy.*

My heart longs for so much:

O Lord, may my heart be restless until it rests in Thee.

Lord, make me an instrument of enduring values,
Where riches rot, let me sow eternal seeds,
Where wealth wilts, let me harvest the horizon,
Where prosperity is a mirage, let me welcome perseverance.
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to live the world's values as Gospel values,
to pursue the American Dream as to dream your dreams,
to have visions of glory as to have confidence in my destiny.
For the heart submitted to you lives beyond today's worries
to that Day when we shall know even as we are fully known,
for we shall see you face to face.²⁶

Go into the world... Notice your desires. Catalog them but do not judge them. Notice what draws you and contemplate the attraction. Is it worthy of eternity? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:22-23

“Some people say, ‘Seeing is believing,’ but at what are you looking? If you look for that which is just and true, beauty that sprouts from goodness and leads toward wholeness, then your eyes are like a lamp that enlightens your entire person. But if you focus only on hate, bigotry, greed, and division, your seeing is a form of blindness, an unholy cataract that distorts your very soul.”

*Angry the news – fake and real – that ushers bitterness into my home.
Hark! Is that Death whose visage I hold in my hand?*

where others fear, let me risk,
where others withhold, let me explore.
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to possess as to participate,
to be seen as better as to become true,
to gain an advantage as to gain a friend.

For it is not the “me” I want you to see that is my truest self,
but the mystery found in Christ from before the beginning of time,
revealed through his Breath as a gift from above,
beloved child of God.

Go into the world... Notice your interactions with others. How many of them are “transactional” or “utilitarian” versus authentic sharing of yourself with another? Seek to remain open to others in the moment of your encounter of them. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:1

“Public righteousness is a burden: it looks great to others, but it cripples motives, taints the soul and makes one’s relationships a commodity; nothing more than a business transaction of the Spirit. The Eternal One is not fooled.”

How easy to look good: busy and productive and fair!

I am all of these things – don’t you see?

And if you do not see me in these ways

I know how to make you look

at all the things I do for others – what a saint I am!!!

But in the still, small whisper of night Holy Spirit calls:

“Who are you trying to deceive?”

O Gentle Spirit, so delicate of touch to cut so deep,

teach me anew my righteousness is as filthy rags,

my greatest goodness the merest glimpse of that grace which alone can heal.

And which will never, ever, come from me.

Lord, make me an instrument of authenticity,
where falsity beckons, let me be my true self,
where my words ring hollow, let truth become my companion,
where my voice is silenced, let me grow a prophet's courage.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to project an image as to be who I am,
to look good as to be genuine,
to seek acclaim as to live the Way.

For it is the Way of Jesus that builds a firm foundation,
the Truth of Jesus that builds a house worthy of calling home,
the Life of Jesus that fills my home with love.

Go into the world... Notice the temptation to look good, to project an image, to seek acclaim. How often during a day does the Tempter come to you? Are there certain situations in which you want to shine, or certain people you want to impress more than others? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:2-5

"Search your soul when you perform righteous acts before others. If your motive is to be seen by others, lauded and applauded, your reward is not from God but already given among women and men. Search your hidden motives whenever you share God's good gifts with others. Self-acclaim is no acclaim in the eyes of God. What sounds to you like a trumpet sounds to God like a kazoo and 'Holy Hypocrite' will be your name. Instead, when you share blessing be so secretive you surprise yourself. And know this: God won't be surprised, and what is shared in human shadows will be rewarded in God's light."

*I am so precise, so detailed, so thorough –
every jot and tittle of my own goodness has been noted, honored, cherished.
Aren't you fortunate to know me!*

*O Friend, must I speak to you as Nathan to David,
Jeremiah in rebuke of Israel,
you are not as righteous as you imagine!*

*If not saints, why do I hear the rumble grumble of their tummies?
And so loud, too.*

Lord, make me an instrument of integrity,
when tempted by the noise of the world, may I live Gospel values,
when tempted by reputation, may I seek character,
when tempted to talk the talk, may I already be walking the walk.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to be super smart as to have the mind of Christ,
to be someone everyone "loves," as to share the heart of Christ,
to do what others want from me as to do the will of Christ.

For the world is filled with more sound and fury
than compassion and conviction,
and the Way of Jesus is clearly more the latter than the former:
may it be so in my life.

Go into the world... Notice your motivations. Who are your audiences throughout the day? Is God one of them? Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:19-21

"Seek riches, desire wealth, pray for prosperity – but only the kind that endures. Riches that rot are folly. If a rat can eat it, it's not worth pursuing. If thieves can steal it, you're a fool to worry about it. True prosperity is found in God's presence. Wealth worthy of the name is found in God's purpose. The riches that matter come from God and lead back to God. All riches call to your heart so be sure it is God-riches whose call you are answering."

*My heart longs for so much:
that which fills my stomach but not my soul, and also
that which brings a joy I could not guess and did not imagine.*

*My heart longs for so much:
that which fashions me according to the image of world and culture, and also
that which forms, reforms, and transforms me into the image for which*

Lord, make me a vessel of the holy,
when closed, preparing to open,
when overwhelmed, preparing to seek,
when dead, preparing to live.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to see only what is before me as always who is before me,
to notice only beauty as to be moved also by the broken,
to give into despair as to kneel in defiance, in prayer.
For the race is not always to the powerful but to the perseverant,
not always to the loud voice but to the gentle whisper,
not always to those who act but also to those who pray.

Go into the world... Notice God's whispers to you. Live in such a rhythm
you notice God nudging you in the direction of compassion or conviction.
As practice, try listening during your times of prayer. Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:16-18

"It's so easy to look good for others but holiness as a circus act
or stage play leads not to God. Do you want others to know you are
fasting? Good for you – you have your reward in full. Anyone can look
good but being good is what matters; not your face but your heart, not
your outward style but your inward substance leads to blessing. When you
fast and pray, don't make a fuss. Keep things low-key, your efforts known
only to God. Know that God sees you; God *sees* and God *knows*. Any
reward will come from God."

The rumble grumble of my tummy reminds me:

it's been almost two hours since I last ate something.

How sad I am when I miss a meal: grumpy when my tummy grumbles.

What must it be like to go without food?

Fasting must be something only saints do, and I'm not a saint. Thank God!

(I'm so glad not to be a saint if it means going without food.)

As I look around my 4th grade classroom I wonder:

is the boy day-dreaming in the back row a saint?

Is the girl in the third row talking to her friend a saint, too?

I love myself, just like the books tell me to – and why not?

Generous to a fault I am, even up to 3.2% of my net income!

Why I even gave the bum with the cardboard sign my half-eaten sandwich.

O Pilgrim, your left hand knows too well what your right hand does.

I fear what sounds to your ear as "Reveille"

sounds to God as "Taps."

Lord, make me an instrument of humility,
where others self-promote, let me promote the common good,
where others put down, let me build up,
where others claim for themselves, let me give credit to all.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
others' praise as others' participation,
credit from others as their cooperation,
to be thought of as good as to be worthy of grace.

For it is not my righteousness that saves,
neither are my thoughts your thoughts,
but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.²⁴

Go into the world... Notice your tendency to claim too much or too little
for yourself. Are you one who overestimates your contributions or one
who underestimates your contributions? Both are dishonest so stop it!
Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:6-8

"Prayer is an act of intimacy with God, so don't parade your
devotion like a lovesick teen on a first date. And prayer is not a contest;
there are no prizes to those who flaunt their devotion best and brightest,
longest and loudest. Trying to convince others of your devotion through
long-winded prayers that micromanage God's response is the act of a
rookie, or a hypocrite. Prayer is intended for intimacy: private is usually
best, personal is an absolute must. Nothing fancy is needed but honesty
is always required, honesty and authenticity. And trust. You see, God
knows our needs before we do and invites us to join the conversation."

*Teach me, O Lord, the gift of silence before You;
instruct my heart toward patience and stillness.
And into the stillness, my God, speak Your Word to my heart;
fill the abyss of my mind with thoughts beyond my imagining,
that overwhelmed with your glory my lips might tremble Your Name;
that simple praise might be my grand overture.
For no other reason than You are God will I pray to You, O Lord;
and prayer to you will be for me a kind of gasping for breath,
greedy desire to fulfill an eternal longing,
completeness of my joy.*

Lord, make me a vessel of prayer,
empty, yet filled with your presence,
silent, yet filled with your Word,
joining the song being sung for eternity.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek for prayer
to meet my needs as to express them,
to make me feel good as to mold me into the image of Christ,
to be about me as to be about you, always you.

For it is the dry root that needs water,
it is the ripening fruit that bathes in the sun,
it is in the intimate moment that love blooms.

Go into the world... Notice your anxious, worried, ever-revolving thoughts when you first sit to pray. Or kneel. Or walk. Or... However it is that you pray, allow yourself to move beyond this initial swirl of the mind to a place of stillness: "Be still and know the Lord is God." Notice. Pray. Act.

Matthew 6:9-15

"Here is how to pray: begin with 'Our' – as in community, you are not alone in the God-life but walk together with others; always remember the gift of others. Pray to God as 'Abba' or 'Imma'²⁵ – as in family, caring and compassionate, yet One to whom you are accountable. Continue praying with blessing and praise – 'Our Abba / Imma in heaven,

holy and sacred your very Name' – yet keep grounded, remembering prayer is earthy and real, rooting one in the promises of God for the sake of a world in need. So say something like, 'your rule come, your reign show up,' call it a 'kingdom' if you wish, always longing for God's reign 'on earth as it is in heaven.'

"Pray for 'daily bread,' the provision of enough, remembering once again that all true prayer is about 'we' not 'me' – the prayer for daily bread is for 'our' daily bread, as in all God's children deserve sustenance. Pray, too, for the spiritual food of forgiveness – ask God to forgive you, your debts, your sins, your trespasses, your weakness and your brokenness, just as you forgive others. You see, forgiveness is a two-way street; it's a necessary part of living together without which God-community cannot flourish. Pray, also, for protection, especially spiritual protection, that when you encounter temptation or evil, and you *will* encounter them, probably daily, God will show you the way forward. Pray, finally, remembering what I said about the importance of forgiveness in building God-community. Too easily do we neglect the gift of forgiveness. If we do not, will not, or cannot let go of sins, we remain shackled to them. In holding on to *others'* sins, we remain chained to our own sins."

*We reach the stars when our knees hit the ground as one;
Discovering the fullness of God-life only in community.
So easy the rote words,
yet so needful the ways they set the rhythm for God-community;
their premise our emptiness;
their foundation the provision that comes from above.
Abba, Imma, are more than words to us: they are
promises of love,
assurances of care,
invitation to God-community,
adoption as God-family.*

O Lord, teach us to pray.

Together.