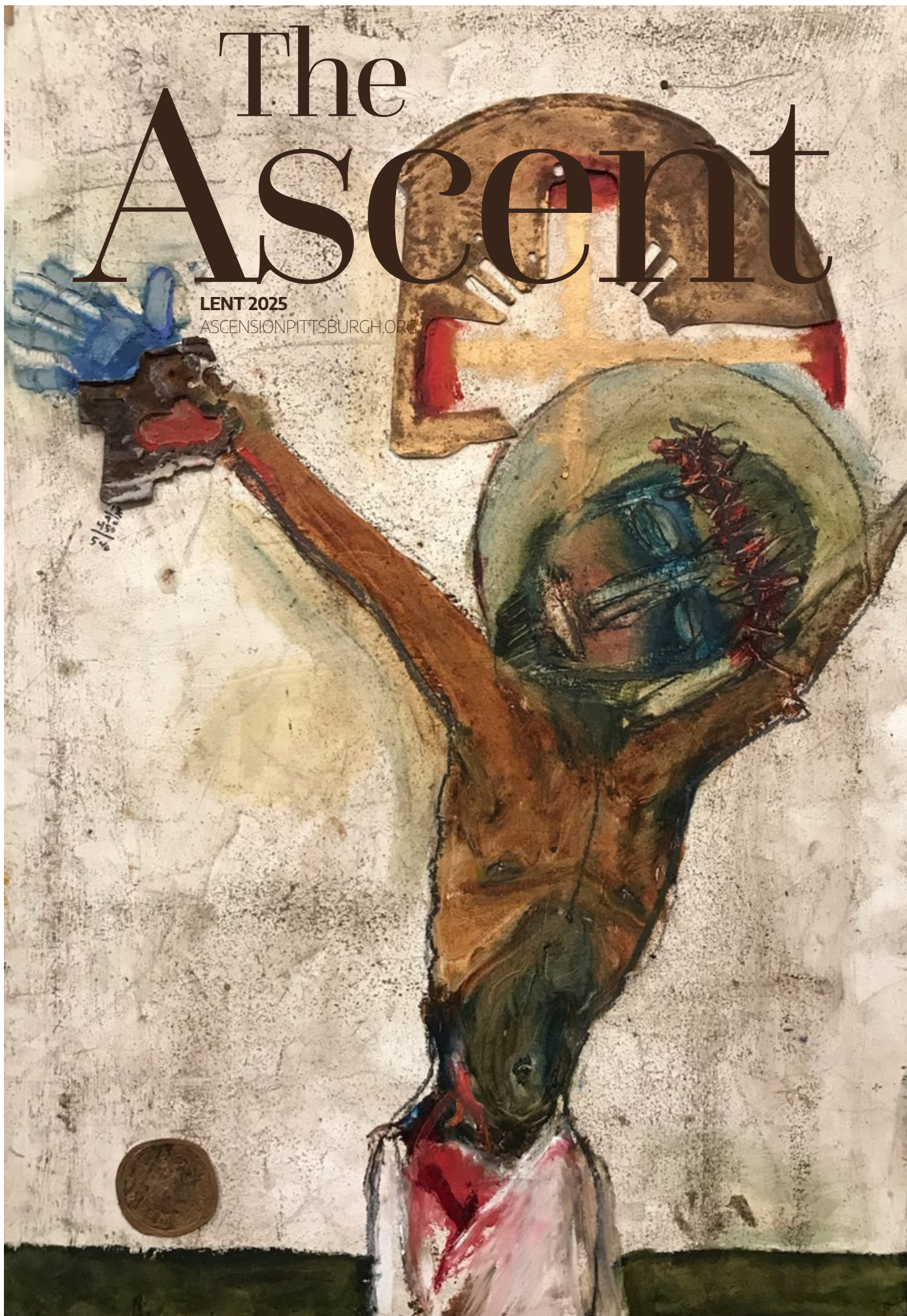


The Ascent

LENT 2025

ASCENSIONPITTSBURGH.ORG



From the Outside In



By Peter Coelho, Rector

peter.coelho@ascensionpittsburgh.org

“The clothes maketh the man.”

The season of Lent presents an opportunity to “try on” the life of Christ more deeply and comprehensively. These seven weeks, leading us into the

Feast of the Resurrection and the season of Easter, often include engagement with specific spiritual practices and disciplines. Christians fast or engage in silence and stillness; they serve and give of themselves to others in a concentrated way. Such practices mark out the Christian

life, following Jesus on the way of the cross at all times, but this season is an opportunity for the church to engage together and push a little further.

The practice of interval training is well-known to produce benefits related to stamina and capacity. Working out at higher intensity for a brief period leads to an increase in overall health. We might think of the season of Lent similarly. We engage in spiritual practices with greater intensity for this period of time that our growth in Christ-likeness might increase. We fast that we may grow in self-control and





increase our capacity for self-denial. We are still and quiet for longer periods, that our lives might be more fully characterized by rest in the love of God and awareness of his presence. We take up an intentional practice of prayer so that our intimacy at all times might increase. We serve or give alms so that our lives may be ready for greater generosity and blessing to others.

In Ephesians 4:24 the apostle Paul implores his readers, and us, to *“put on the new self-created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* The verb “put on” in that verse can refer literally to putting on clothes. Paul’s exhortation is that the followers of Jesus should deliberately and intentionally array themselves in the actions and characteristics he displayed. This command carries force, whatever our disposition or feelings. Regardless of whatever “comes naturally,” we are called to act as newly created daughters and sons of God, made in the likeness of Christ. We put on the life he has won for us.

In this work, those disciplines, named “practices of engagement,” are particularly helpful. Rhythms of study, worship, confession, and service shape us in the qualities that marked out Jesus’ life. This is what we *“put on,”* especially in the season of Lent.

In the verses just before verse 24, Paul also implores his readers to *“put off their old self.”* Being an apprentice of Jesus includes both the positive acquisition of his likeness and the rejection of ways of being and acting that counter God’s desires. Paul specifically writes of putting off “deceitful desires” and “impurity.” Patterning our lives after Jesus’, who lived in perfect obedience, involves setting aside these things.

This exhortation connects well with what have been termed “practices of abstinence,” such as fasting, silence, frugality, and solitude. In taking on these practices, even for seven weeks, we distance ourselves from deceitful desires and disrupt patterns of life that might lead us away from

dependence on God, from Jesus’s humility, peace, and holiness.

Paul’s exhortations to put on and put off are a particular focus for us in Lent this year. There are opportunities to do both in our corporate life over the coming weeks. Be encouraged to take hold of these opportunities this Lent. Practice Christ-likeness in these ways and on your own.

Like putting on dressy clothes, a suit, or a ballroom gown changes the way we carry ourselves, let us allow the practices of this season to change our posture. Lay hold of your true identity as one made new in Christ. Put off those things that do not accord with who you are. And take up those practices and patterns that may, by the power of the Holy Spirit, shape you to look and live more like Jesus. In Christ and through the Holy Spirit, we are being renewed from the inside out at all times. This Holy Lent, let us participate in that transforming work. In this season, let us take off and put on and be changed from the outside in.

An Invitation to Fast Together During Lent



By Kevin Antlitz, Assistant Rector

kevin.antlitz@ascensionpittsburgh.org

Lent is a season of repentance and preparation. This season provides us with the opportunity to inventory our lives – our desires, our mindset, our habits – and then reorient them. During Lent, we turn from ways that lead to death and turn to ways that lead us to life. Lent also provides us with the opportunity to prepare for the yearly celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at the end of Holy Week.

Over the centuries, a few practices have been central to practicing repentance and preparing to celebrate the resurrection. The three practices at the heart of observing a Holy Lent are prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. In the rest of this article, I want to press into the practice of fasting.

If you don't have a lot of experience with fasting, let me share a little bit about this often-neglected spiritual discipline and why saints through the ages have regularly practiced it. In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster defines fasting as "abstaining from food for spiritual purposes." He distinguishes fasting from something like hunger strikes or dieting to lose weight. The former is done to draw attention to a worthy cause or perhaps gain political power and the latter is used for a physical purpose (and perhaps sometimes for vanity). Fasting, however, is focused on spiritual goals like cultivating humility and dependence on God

The spiritual practice of fasting was central to the lives of the earliest Christian believers but is largely neglected today. According to the *Didache*, a 1st century church manual, the early church made a habit of fasting twice a week throughout the year. We would do well to retrieve this discipline as fasting can have a profound impact on our spiritual lives.

The practice is most often linked with humility in the Bible (see Psalm 69:10; Ezra 8:21, and Joel 1:14; 2:12, 15). By forsaking food, we remind ourselves of our ultimate dependence on God. Fasting takes our utter dependence upon God beyond mere words and cultivates dependence through the use of our bodies.

Fasting is also connected with repentance (see 1Sam 7:6; Nehemiah 9:1-2). You might even think of fasting as a way of training ourselves to repent – to turn from and turn to. When we fast, we are reminded of our weakness and sinfulness. Sometimes these are connected and sometimes they are distinct. But both remind us of our utter dependence on God. By fasting, we seek to turn our desires from attachments to the world and direct them to God himself.

I want to be clear that fasting is not explicitly commanded in the Scriptures. That being said, Jesus assumed his followers would fast (Matt 6:16). So, this is not a "thou shalt" kind of thing. As it turns out, the Bible has more to say about how not to fast than the particulars for how to do so (see Isaiah 58). As the Pharisees in the Gospels show us, there is often a temptation for fasting to devolve into



The Digital Fast

legalism. This temptation is to be faced and resisted. We fast to grow closer to God, not to earn God's favor or as some sort of Christian virtue signaling.

So how will all of this work? There are two ways you can practice fasting this Lent.

Daily Prayer Guide (pick up a copy)

The first is by following the fasting schedule in the Daily Prayer Guide (distributed in church at the beginning of Lent). Each week, we will invite you into a different fast. One week might be abstaining from food, another might be from social media, another from coffee or alcohol. You can track with each of the fasts in the "Our Lenten Fasts" section of the Prayer Guide. One thing to keep in mind is that Christians typically don't fast on Sundays (especially from food). Sundays are "feast" days in celebration of the resurrection (this is why Sundays are not technically included in the 40 days of Lent).

Digital Fast (register on the app)

The second way you can practice fasting is by signing up to participate in a digital fast. In addition to the rhythm of fasts outlined in the Prayer Guide, a number of Ascensionites will follow the Digital Fast Workbook. This workbook will guide us through a 28-day digital fast to help us redesign our relationship with technology. The digital fast is essentially a daily devotional that guides us through a digital fast. It is broken down into four weeks and each week has a theme: detach, discover, delight, and determine. Although Christians do not typically fast from food on Sundays, the digital fast will begin on March 9,

which is the first Sunday of Lent. If you're interested, you can register for the digital fast on the website or the app and purchase a copy of the workbook when you register. I will be communicating with everyone who registers for the digital fast and provide direction as we fast together.

Finally, a few words of instruction and caution on fasting from food. First, if you are new to fasting from food, I encourage you to start small and work up (e.g., begin by abstaining from one meal rather than food for a whole day). Second, if you have had serious eating issues in the past, you should approach fasting with great caution. Consider fasting from a particular type of food (i.e., meat, dessert, snacks, etc.) rather than all food. It would also be wise to ask a trusted friend to join you in this and track with you to ensure you're not slipping back into destructive habits of thinking and acting. Fasting with spiritual friends and sharing this experience together is always better than fasting alone. Lastly, for all of us, it is important to consult your doctor before fasting as certain medical conditions may make it unsafe to fast.

I hope you'll join us in the practice of fasting. I am praying for God's grace in each of our lives to help us observe a Holy Lent.

Lenten Hospitality



By Kate Marwood, Hospitality Coordinator
kate.marwood@ascensionpittsburgh.org

I know what you all have been wondering, “How do we practice hospitality in the season of Lent, when Lent is all about fasting, and hospitality is all about eating?” Great news! Hospitality involves more than snacks, and Lent involves more than just fasting!

In the season of Lent, we are encouraged to partake in practices of fasting while using that extra margin to engage in spiritual disciplines. As hospitality coordinator, I have the immense privilege of helping to facilitate the after-church hospitality hour by providing an abundance of delicious snacks. We are a church that has been blessed with resources to make that possible. In this season of Lent, you will notice a bit of a change to hospitality hour. Please do not panic! There will still be snacks, but they will be simpler.

There will be a smaller, more budget-friendly selection

of snacks. The money saved will be put towards building a ‘little free pantry’ that will be placed outside our building to be accessed by the community. If you are unfamiliar with what a little free pantry is, it is a community-based food pantry where people can take what they need and leave what they can. As pantry hosts, Church of the Ascension will regularly stock the pantry through donations received by our church community, but this will also be an opportunity for the community outside of Ascension to be involved. More information to come! My hope is that the little free pantry will be built and ready to go by Easter.

So, in the season of Lent, as you notice the changes in our hospitality hour, I encourage you to thank God for our abundant resources, and say a prayer for those who do not have the same resources. Consider asking God how he might be showing you ways to be hospitable and generous to others.

A Holy Pause: Daily Midday Prayer



By Jess Bennett, Curate
jess.bennett@ascensionpittsburgh.org

“You will never have time for prayer, you must make time.” — Richard J. Foster

A t 12:30pm on a given weekday, our church is scattered throughout Pittsburgh across homes, workplaces, and schools. We may be surrounded by people, caring for our children, or alone, burdened by a mountain of tasks before us or wishing we had something to do.

We invite you to join us in setting aside 12:30pm throughout Lent as a holy pause: where we, as a church community, make time to pray: apart, yet united in one voice.

Midday Prayer, one of the Daily Offices in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, is wonderfully suited for this — the liturgy is simple and takes less than fifteen

minutes. If you’ve picked up our Daily Prayer Guide for Lent from the church, then you already have a copy! (*More can be found at the back of the Nave and at the Connection Desk*).

If you’re planning to also fast from meals as part of your Lenten discipline, consider this time of prayer as the substitute for your regular lunch — and “*feast upon God*”, as Dallas Willard so beautifully put it.

Wherever you find yourself on weekdays at 12:30pm, will you come together with us to the throne of Grace? Come hungry (*sorry*) to see what the Lord might do as we open ourselves to Him, hear His promises and bring before Him both our needs and the needs of the world.

Lenten Recovery Retreat: Loving Jesus in Everyday Life Using 12 Step Spirituality



By Lauren Scharf, Staff Priest

lauren.scharf@ascensionpittsburgh.org

“Why isn’t knowing Jesus making more of a difference in my everyday life?” This question became a despairing refrain in my heart throughout my twenties and early thirties. Because I DID absolutely know Jesus. I was becoming a priest for crying out loud! Yet my everyday life felt like a battle I was fighting all on my own - intermittently punctuated with guilt and shame that I must be doing something wrong. Maybe if I could pray more consistently or read Scripture without asking so many darn questions all the time... Where was this ‘peace that passes understanding’ and how could I get some?!

All of that changed when I joined a 12 Step Fellowship for the first time. I was battle worn – exhausted spiritually, mentally, and physically when I arrived. Yet no one seemed put off by my fear or my anger or my despair or the depth of my sin and suffering. It was a bit like coming in from a storm to find warm blankets, a crackling fire, and friends who were not particularly concerned about the storm outside because they were confident their shelter would hold. I spent the next two years with an amazing sponsor who walked with me through the 12 Steps. Those 12 Steps led me straight to Jesus.

There are many beautiful tools that the Lord has provided throughout the ages to His Church to help us draw nearer to Him. We have so many disciplines and practices, passed down from our spiritual mothers and fathers, that have consistently created pathways to knowing the Lord in deeper ways. I believe that in the 1930’s, the 12 Steps were gifted to us as another reliable pathway and tool to draw nearer to Him.

Conceived and nurtured in the cradle of the Christian Church, the 12 Steps are profoundly spiritual and fundamentally gospel centered. They are, I believe, a reliable pathway of discipleship not just for those that



struggle with obvious addiction, but for any Christian who is asking the question, “Why isn’t knowing Jesus making more of a difference in my everyday life?”

Today, because I was handed a set of spiritual tools that made sense to my very practical heart and, sometimes, overwhelmed mind, there is hardly a moment where I cannot now see how knowing Jesus is making a difference in every part of my life. I long to share the absolute embarrassment of riches that so many Christians have found tucked away in our church basements with our “upstairs” communities.

It is with tremendous joy that I look forward to Saturday, March 29th from 8:30am through 1:30pm when I can offer a taste of what I have been working on. During this mini-Lenten retreat, we will look at the nature of sin and addiction, the 12 Steps themselves, and consider how they might inform and enrich our lives with Jesus in practical ways. Please register on the app for this time together. The cost is \$15. Lunch will be provided.

The Rite of Reconciliation of Penitents

“Penitent” is a churchy type of word. It refers to one who feels or shows regret and sorrow for those things done wrong. It’s a good Lenten word. Penitents are invited to bring their regrets and sorrows to the Lord, through the Church, using The Rite of Reconciliation (otherwise known as Confession).

Confession is an important part of Anglican spirituality. It is something we do each week as we gather for corporate worship. It is a daily spiritual practice for those who pray the Daily Office – Morning and Evening Prayer.

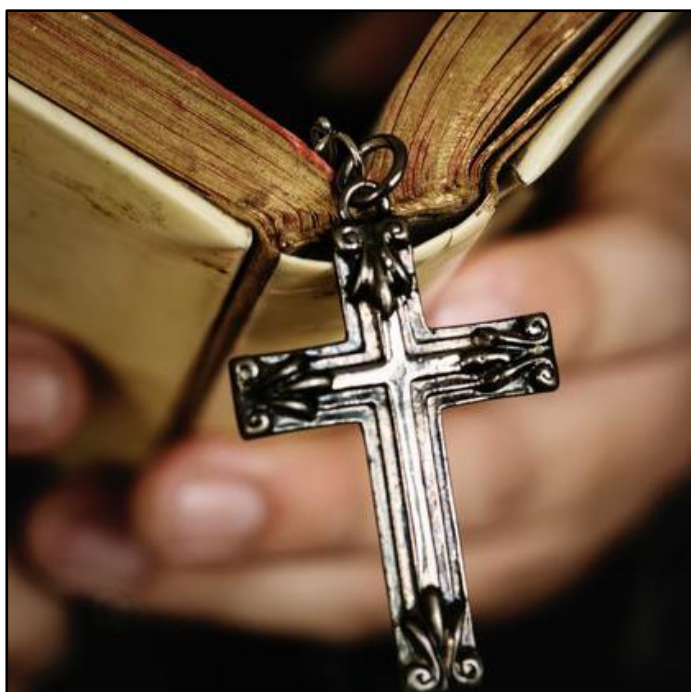
Confession is particularly suited for Lent. In our Ash Wednesday liturgy, we are called “to the observance of a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word” (BCP 544). Lent is a season for repentance and reconciliation.

There is a helpful Anglican saying about this Rite: “All may, none must, some should.” There is no obligation to participate in Confession, yet many experience freedom and healing in this Sacramental Rite. There is something sacred in having another bear witness to our true repentance and commitment to amendment of life. There is healing when those things that block relationship with God, neighbor and self are confessed and forgiven. There is healing in hearing the words of absolution and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, following Jesus’ command to “go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

What to Expect: The Rite of Reconciliation is an individual, one-on-one time with a priest who will listen, counsel, direct, comfort, and pray for the penitent. We use the 2019 Book of Common Prayer’s liturgy. It is typically scheduled as a brief (15-20-minute appointment) at Ascension, typically in the Gordon Chapel.

Preparation: Come as you are. Some people know precisely what they need to confess. Others have more of a vague notion. There is no prescribed process for preparing for the Rite of Reconciliation, however, if you want ideas for preparing, you might consider the following:

- Pray through the “Confession and Litany of Penitence” found in the Ash Wednesday liturgy (547-549) before



your appointment; prayerfully pause on those petitions that speak to matters in your life; ask the Lord to grant you a new and contrite heart.

- Ask the Lord to bring to your mind those sins that are interfering with your relationship with God and others (things that have offended against God’s love and holiness); express sorrow for those sins (contrition); and, by God’s grace, resolve to change, to make “amendment of life.”
- Pray “The Great Litany” (91-99), prayerfully pausing on those petitions that feel like invitations to greater examination of conscience.

If you have other questions about this Rite or to make an appointment, feel free to reach out to any of our staff priests:

- Peter Coelho: peter.coelho@ascensionpittsburgh.org
- Kevin Antlitz: kevin.antlitz@ascensionpittsburgh.org
- Lauren Scharf: lauren.scharf@ascensionpittsburgh.org
- Jess Bennett: jess.bennett@ascensionpittsburgh.org
- Josh Bennett: josh.bennett@ascensionpittsburgh.org
- Wes Williams: wes.williams@ascensionpittsburgh.org
- Daniel Behrens: behrensdg1@gmail.com

Music During Lent



By Gary Harger, Traditional Worship Music Coordinator
gary.harger@ascensionpittsburgh.org

Glory be to Jesus

Worship, rooted in the rhythm of the liturgical calendar, is at the center of our common life together. As we join in worship to hear scripture, pray, and sing we join in a glorious throng of saints who have gone before us. As part of our Lenten tradition, and as part of both services, the doxology will be “Glory Be to Jesus.”

*Glory be to Jesus, who in bitter pains
 poured for me the lifeblood from his sacred veins!
 Grace and life eternal in that blood I find,
 blest be his compassion infinitely kind!*

*Blest through endless ages be the precious stream
 which from sin and sorrow doth the world redeem!
 Oft as earth exulting wafts its praise on high,
 angel hosts, rejoicing, make their glad reply*

*Lift ye then your voices; swell the mighty flood;
 louder still and louder, praise the precious blood.*

Preludes during Lent

We have a tradition of vocal and instrumental music as a prelude to our services. The prelude functions as a call away from our ordinary day to day lives and acts as an invitation to focus our hearts and attention to the worship of the triune God. Just as we light the altar candles before the service and prepare the table for the eucharist, the prelude gives us an opportunity to quiet our hearts individually before we join in worship together. This Lent our preludes will be led by various instrumentalists in our congregation, who will share encouragement and testimonies through their music.

Call for Singers and Instrumentalists

The choir sings as a part of the 11am service throughout Lent and will also sing for special services on Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil, as well as the 11am Easter Service. If you would like to join the choir for Holy Week, please email our Choir Director at jenn.miller@ascensionpittsburgh.org. Rehearsals for Holy Week will be held on Thursday evenings from 7-9pm in the Millard Multipurpose Room on March 27, April 3 and April 10.

Perhaps you noticed the addition of a brass ensemble at our Service of Lessons and Carols in December. This small group is ready to expand. Consider dusting off your instrument and joining them in playing for the Festival Easter Service at 11 am. Email Gary Harger for more information and rehearsal times.



Stations of the Cross



By Wes Williams, Curate

wes.williams@ascensionpittsburgh.org

Payerful meditation on the Stations of the Cross is an historic Christian tradition through which the Church has reflected on the narrative of Christ's condemnation, crucifixion, and death. The final hours of Christ's earthly life are broken into several "stations" at which worshipers are asked to stop, meditate, and pray on the moment being represented to them.

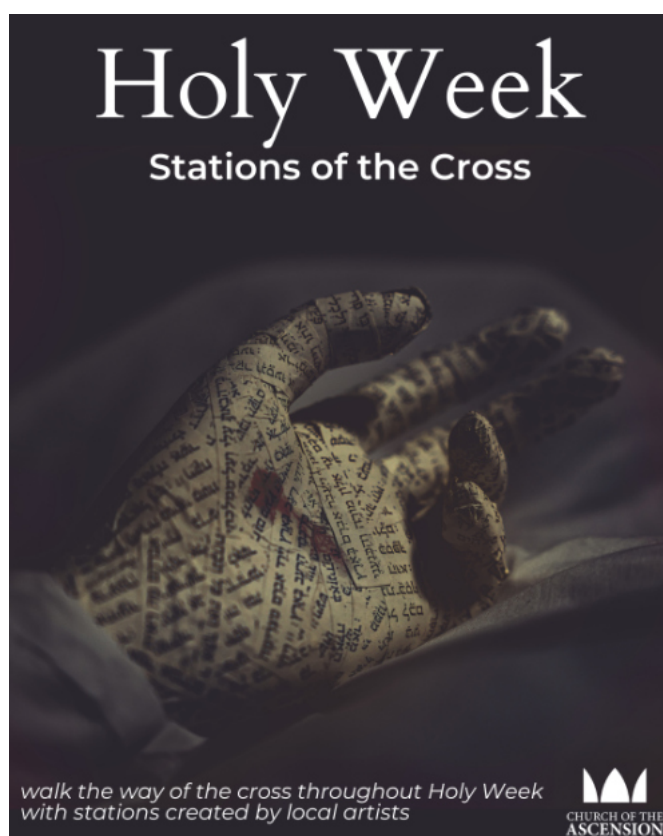
In the Catholic church, there are fourteen stations, beginning with Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and ending with Jesus being laid in the tomb. Some of these stations borrow from extra-biblical sources, but most are pulled directly from Scripture.

As a practice, Church of the Ascension has kept eight biblical stations. The Stations we reflect on, in order, are:

- Jesus Condemned to Death
- Jesus Takes Up His Cross
- The Cross is Laid on Simon of Cyrene
- Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem
- Jesus is Stripped of His Garments
- Jesus is Nailed to the Cross
- Jesus Dies on the Cross
- Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

At Ascension, we are blessed to have many artists in our worshipping community. We have taken up the practice of inviting our artists to create pieces that represent each station using their own interpretive style. We have recruited eight artists and are excited to see the work that comes from their personal meditations on their respective stations.

The Stations of the Cross will be on display throughout Holy Week this year. All are welcome to reflect through Christ's passion using the stations between 12pm and 7pm each day of the week, Monday through Thursday. On Maundy Thursday we particularly invite families with young children to come to reflect on the stations. On Good Friday after the Noonday service, the Nave will be open for reflection on the stations until 3pm.



Introducing Our New Worship Arts Ministry: The Arts Collaboratives



By Wes Williams, Curate

wes.williams@ascensionpittsburgh.org

We are excited to announce Church of the Ascension's new worship arts ministry, the Arts Collaboratives! The Arts Collaboratives are a space where artists within Ascension can connect with one another, be encouraged in their art and faith, and be, as artists, integrated into the life of the church.

We want all artists at our church to feel welcome, to thrive in their art and faith, and to be part of a community with other artists so that they can encourage one another in those areas.

We want our artists to feel the freedom to *be* here; to be artists, connect with other artists, and bring their artistic perspective into the life of our church

The production of a certain quality of art is not the defining characteristic of an artist. What we value is how artists see and engage with the world and those around them. Again, this is about building community. There is also no expectation for any amount of artistic output from an artist for them to belong in the Arts Collaboratives.

We currently have seven collaboratives open to all artists at the church, which can be found under Groups in the Church Center app. They are: 2D Artists, 3D Artists, Drama, Gardeners, Music Performers, Songwriters, and Writers.

We understand this is a non-exhaustive list. This ministry has a hope for growth, and as this ministry bears fruit, more opportunities for expansion will arise.

I'm very excited for the potential of this ministry, and I hope that it leads to a flourishing faith in our artists, and the edification of our Ascension community.



THE ARTS



COLLABORATIVES





Getting Ready for Easter Sunday!

The Way of the Cross: A Five-Senses Good Friday Program for Children



By Catherine Slocum, Director of Children's Ministry
catherine.slocum@ascensionpittsburgh.org

As we journey through the season of Lent and prepare our hearts for the resurrection of Easter Sunday, we invite families to join us for a memorable and meaningful Good Friday experience. Our "Way of the Cross" program is designed to help children engage with the final days of Jesus' life in a unique, sensory-rich way.

On Good Friday, from 12:00 to 1:45 PM, children ages 4 to 11 will embark on a guided journey through the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus. Using all five senses, they will

experience key moments from the Bible story, making this powerful journey not only educational but deeply memorable.

Program Highlights:

- **Foot Washing & Last Supper (Hunt Room)**
 The journey begins with Jesus' intimate moment with his disciples at the Last Supper. Children will hear the scripture from *Mark 14:12-25* and reflect on the act of foot washing. They will engage in a sensory activity, tasting Mediterranean foods like naan bread, hummus,

fresh lemons, grapes, and olive oil with seasonings, while considering the bond Jesus shared with his followers.

- **The Garden of Gethsemane (New Catacombs)**

Next, children will learn about Jesus' time in the garden of Gethsemane as he prayed and prepared for what was to come. Through a short video and time for quiet reflection, they will experience the stillness and tension of this sacred moment.

- **Jesus Before Pilate (Courtyard)**

In the courtyard, children will hear the powerful words of *Mark 15:1-20*, depicting Jesus' trial before Pilate. They will participate in this "Mockery of the King" by wearing paper crowns and holding up signs that read, "Crucify Him!" helping them to engage in the story of how Jesus was treated while on trial.

- **Jesus Nailed to the Cross (Courtyard)**

At this station, children will hear the scripture from *Mark 15:32-39*, recounting Jesus' crucifixion. They will have the chance to touch a wooden cross and imagine the pain and sacrifice Jesus endured. They will also write or draw on paper things they are sorry for and nail them to the cross. The experience of hammering nails into a wooden board, will help them encounter the stark reality of Jesus' suffering.

- **Singing "Were You There?" (Surrounding Cross in Courtyard)**

The final station will be a powerful time of reflection and song. Children will join in singing the hymn "Were You There?" along with a few other songs while looking at a cross in the courtyard.

Creative Expression and Hope

If time permits, children will then participate in a hands-on activity, taking tile pieces and placing them in clay to create something beautiful and new. Just as Christ's resurrection brings new life from death, this activity will symbolize the redemption and hope that Easter brings.

At the conclusion of this experience, our hope is that the children will leave with hearts filled with the hope of Easter Sunday, ready to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Please Register your child

This program is a meaningful part of our church's Lenten journey, and we encourage parents to register their children in advance to ensure their spot. With a team of dedicated volunteers - including Father Jack Gabig as our teacher, and Josh Moyer and Michael Savisky leading songs - we are excited to offer this special time to our young ones.

We look forward to walking alongside your children as they grow in understanding and faith, preparing for the joy of Easter. Register today and make this Good Friday a powerful experience for your child!

Why Refugees?



By Daniel Behrens, Ascension Missionary in Residence

behrendg1@gmail.com

The first weeks of 2025 have been marked with many changes to U.S. immigration policies. One of the many orders has affected refugee resettlement particularly. The U.S. halted processing of refugees and cancelled previously scheduled arrivals. Days later, agencies were ordered to stop providing resettlement services, even to clients who just arrived as legal refugees to the United States.

In the midst of this emotionally draining tumult, it is important for Christians to zoom out and ask: Why refugees? Is there a particular reason for the church to serve refugees?

To answer this question, we must begin, not with our political party, but with Scripture. Let me borrow heavily from an article from World Vision entitled, “What does the Bible say about refugees and displaced people?”

The article draws seven principles from the numerous Biblical stories and commands regarding how God’s people treat “strangers.” A “stranger” is not simply someone you have not met, but rather someone “strange” to your community, an outsider, perhaps a foreigner, the one with whom you do not have an obvious tie of blood or culture or even religion. Here are seven Biblical principles which the article identifies:

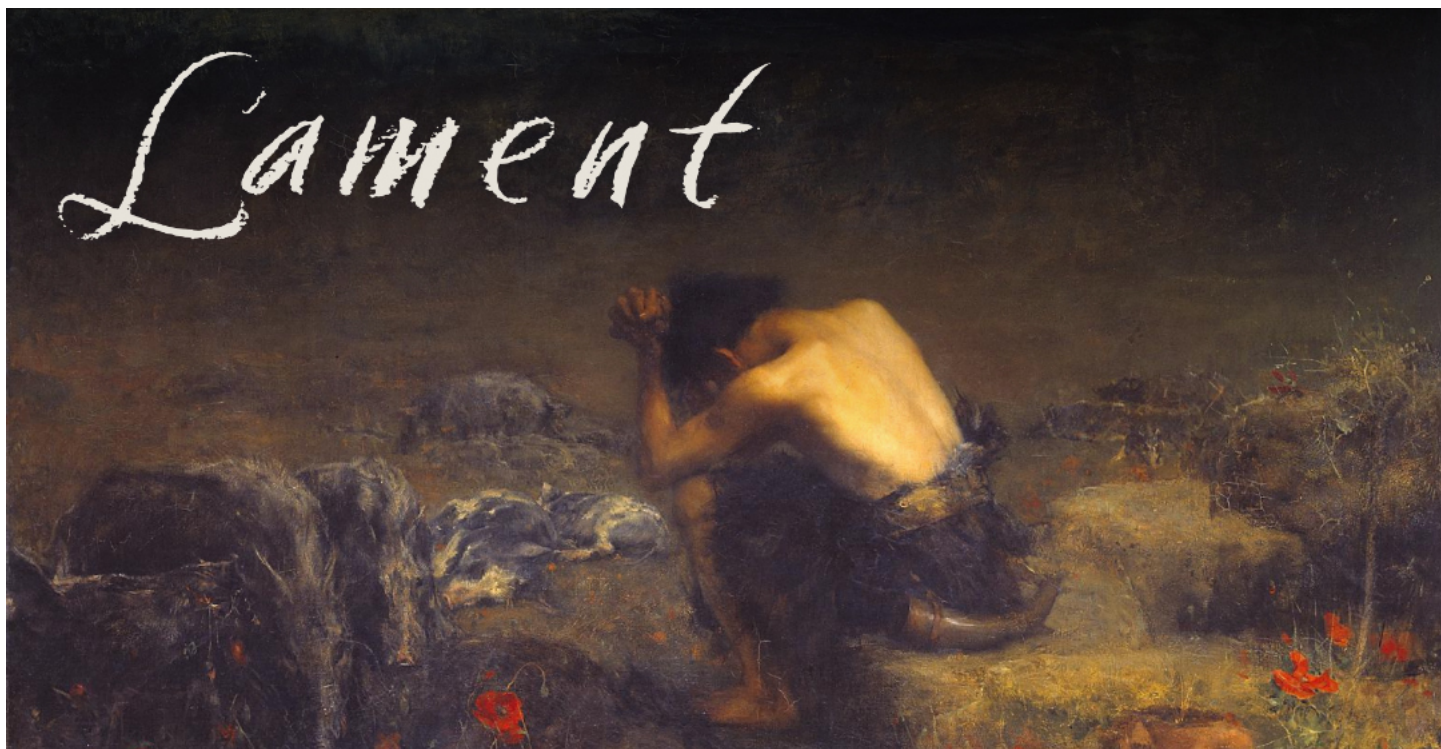
- Jesus said we should show disciple-like behavior (i.e. we show we are his disciples) in how we treat “strangers.”
- Foreigners or refugees are not to be oppressed.
- Treat foreigners or refugees as citizens — and with love.
- Make foreigners part of the community.
- Show hospitality to strangers.
- All believers are strangers on earth.
- All believers in Jesus Christ belong to the kingdom of God.



The Bible has a LOT to say about how God’s people treat “strangers,” and what it does say pushes us to a posture of compassion, hospitality, and even reverence for those who are “strange” in our communities. Here is my point: Christians should engage in the political process and have lively discussions on HOW we can best serve today’s “strangers.” I am not at all in favor of all the ways immigration happens right now. But we should be united in the conviction that concern for strangers is a biblical value, which we dare not discard.

Back to refugees, which is just one of the modern terms for a certain type of “stranger.” Refugee resettlement is a clear way to show hospitality to particularly desperate, disadvantaged, forcibly displaced people, and to offer them a clear, legal path to welcome in this country. I hope Christians will speak up and ask our representatives to reinstate the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

I pray that we will continue to unite around biblical values and find creative ways to live as the body of Christ in rapidly-changing times. If you are not already, I hope you will get involved with the International Ministry (PittsburghEnglish4U@gmail.com) and Refugee Ministry (danielbehrens@sams-usa.org)!



By James Scannell

jds2001@icloud.com

From the editor: For this issue James, a young adult at Ascension who has non-speaking autism and communicates via a spelling board, reflects on silence and lament.

Once I was interviewed by a theologian who asked how I thought the liturgy might be different if it were written by an autistic person. I gave him two main thoughts: one was that it would have more silence. The other was that it would have more lament. Given that autistic people tend to have sensory issues, perhaps “more silence” is not surprising. But why lament? Because our cries of anguish to God are precious to Him. It is biblical to express our distress - see the psalms and the words of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. Lament is an expression of faith: no one cries out to a God in whom they have no faith.

And yet lament seems often absent from our worship. We frequently seem uncomfortable with it. Of course, I’m not suggesting that we focus mainly on the negative, but perhaps there could be a space in our public discourse for acknowledging pain and the challenges

we face. We all hold sorrow and joy together in our hearts. Neither is to be “gotten over”, but to be lived alongside.

I’ll be making a slight change of direction in my next column and will be interviewing people who have had deep pains. (Of course that’s everyone!). I want to hear their hearts and how they have known God during dark times.

I so appreciate the vulnerability parishioners have shown during my conversations and the risk they have taken being public with their struggles. I hope this brings us closer to one another and shines light on our compassionate God who never leaves or forsakes us.

I wish you all a Holy Lent. May you see God in this season of fasting and be ever mindful of His love. Amen.

Fearfully & Wonderfully Made

By James Scannell

jds2001@icloud.com

From the editor: For this issue James, a young adult at Ascension who has non-speaking autism and communicates via a spelling board, interviews Jim Wilson, long time member of Ascension and former Assistant US Attorney. Jim was married to Christina Carlucci for 29 years and he and Christina attended Ascension together beginning in 1990. In late December 2018 Christina suffered an aneurysm in her brain, despite surgery and significant recovery she suffered a severe stroke and passed away at the end of January 2019.

JAMES: How did you come to Ascension?

JIM: I came to Ascension in 1982 with a group of people who were trying to create a neighborhood community on the north side.

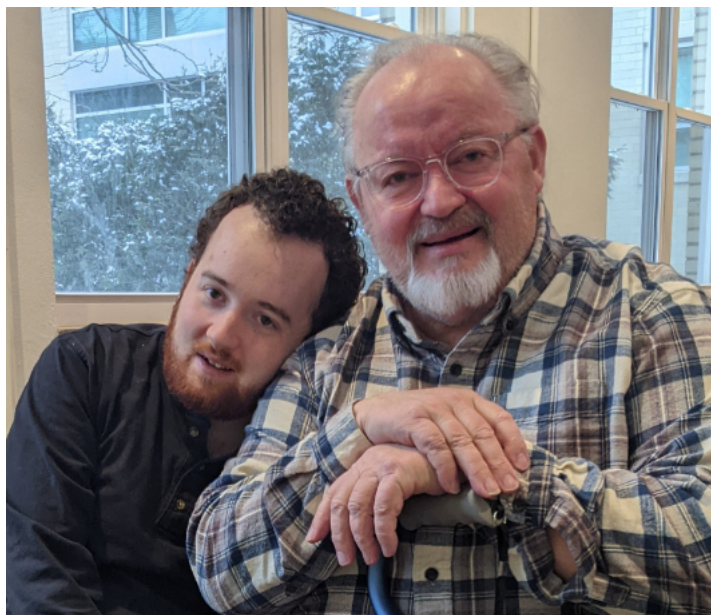
JAMES: I'd like to know more about your spiritual growth or journey over the last few decades.

JIM: I came to Christ when I was about 5 years old in a church service where the preacher was Dr. A.W. Tozer. I then led a sadly typical Christian life for a kid who cared more about British Invasion music and sports than the things of the gospel - until my church asked kids in the youth group to do things in a worship service. I was asked to preach. In the preparation for the sermon — which was on the passage where Jesus heals the man born blind - I had a spiritual renewal / awakening.

I went to college in the same year the CCO was born on campus, and I had a very formative relationship with my CCO staff person. I had a role in the leadership of the campus ministry. Any time you presume to be part of Christian leadership, and you try to communicate the gospel to other people, you inevitably grow yourself. I've been reading and listening to serious Christian writers and speakers ever since. There were 3 hallmarks along the way: the books of Dr. Francis Schaeffer, Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, and now the work of N.T. Wright. I treasure deeply all three of them.

JAMES: I want to know how you met Christina.

JIM: I went to National airport in Washington DC in April of 1985 to catch a plane to Boston. I thought I was entering the waiting area to get on a plane. Little did I know that most of the rest of my life was waiting there for me. I met



Christina in the waiting room for a Peoples' Express flight to Boston.

JAMES: Shut up! What happened?

JIM: James, that is a long not-altogether-happy story. She was sitting with a Bible on her lap. Not that many beautiful young blondes sit with Bibles on their laps, so I was attracted in many ways. The airline had open seating, so we sat together on the plane. We talked about the passage in Scripture she had been reading and much more that was, shall we say, not particularly biblical. She got off in Newark and I continued to Boston. I learned in our conversation that she was a graduate student at Gallaudet University and so I went there the next week when I got back from Boston. I found Chris and took her to dinner. During our getting to know each other over the next few weeks I asked her to go to a concert in Virginia with me - Peter, Paul and Mary - and she said that she was sorry, she didn't think she could, because she would be on her honeymoon that weekend, which you can understand got my attention.

She got married and promptly disappeared from my life. She went to live in Arizona. I went to live in San Diego on a work assignment (for the DOJ on a kidnap murder case). About 2 1/2 years later I got a phone call out of the blue. It was Chris, she was no longer married, and she was moving

back to DC. Where was I? So, we eventually reconnected, and 3 children and nearly 30 years of marriage later here I am.

JAMES: Wow, I love that. You must have thought all was lost.

JIM: James, you're right. I was very downcast by the events I just described for you. But the real takeaway from the short period of time of the 6-8 weeks that we were seeing each other, mostly going out to dinner - she kind of ruined me for anybody else. After that I found myself comparing anyone I went out with to her and everyone always paled in comparison.

JAMES: I wonder how you managed that "downcast" time.

JIM: I found a good church in the community that I lived in in San Diego. And I was working an assignment that was incredibly intense - the kidnap and murder of an American agent in Mexico by some international drug trafficking groups. I was traveling to Mexico and trying to get cooperation from the government authorities there. I was very busy and I was trying to grow up as a Christian. I needed to grow up. That was part of that whole time.

JAMES: Coming to the present, how do you feel about being retired?

JIM: So far, I like retirement very much, James. I had a lot of friends who said it would be a difficult transition, but my transition has been easy. I have embraced the sloth and indolence aspects of retirement with great enthusiasm. Retirement so far is very nice and I highly recommend it.

JAMES: I'm wondering how you spend time and what new dreams you have.

JIM: That's a difficult question James. The absence of the lovely Christina has a deleterious effect on dreams. For example, when we talked about retirement, I didn't have a huge list of things I wanted to do, but we had a

handful of places that we wanted to travel to together. I don't really want to go to those places anymore. There's a British poet who said, "Beauty in the absence of the beloved is like a knife through the heart". (Dante Gabriel Rosetti actually said 'sword' not 'knife') I find that to be true and it spills out into the whole area of dreams and future plans. I'm hopeful that I can have a positive impact on the life of my 3 children - in terms of presence, financial support and otherwise. But I don't have a larger vision at this point in my life for things I want or need to do.



I've also reached the place where I've started to lose friends. That's extremely difficult for me. My very best friend in the world died in August. We saw it coming, it wasn't a shock. I used to contact him regularly. He was a music teacher, and I would make a new discovery of some classical composer, and I'd call him and ask, "Hey do you know about so-and-so?" and he'd always know about so-and-so, and he would tell me other composers to listen to. He was also a sports guy, and I'd call him with obscure baseball questions. He could always answer any of them immediately.

Also, the very first Christian brother I made in college died two years ago. We stayed in touch all these years. I don't know if that affects dreams, but the absence of those guys is hard. Instead of my life getting

bigger, I feel as if it's constricting.

JAMES: Grief stifles. Do you have thoughts for others who grieve?

JIM: First, let me preface this by saying this - and don't feel bad if I lose my composure and weep a little bit, because that happens. I don't get to talk about Christina enough. Even my good friends who knew her don't very often bring her up; sometimes I feel it's as if they are afraid they're going to remind me that she's dead or something. As if I might have forgotten in the interim! But I think grieving is very, very personal. By that I mean this: I'm going to guess that you have some things that are precious to you - people, places or possessions. They may or may not be what the world calls valuable. And there are people likewise in our lives that are precious to us. But "precious" is a highly subjective, personal thing. It's because we invest value in these things and people. I think grieving follows how we assign value to things.

Christina occupied a place of greatest value in my life. There was no relationship I valued more, there was no one I cared for more - even my children. In her absence, there is an enormous vacuum that I feel every moment, every day. But I recognize that that's not unique in any way. Millions of people around the world lose someone precious to them every single day. But every one of them will mourn or grieve in a different way.

In my own situation because of my work and my retirement income and my savings, I don't have to keep working to make a living. I have the luxury of time - but that luxury of time can double back and kind of slap you in the face because you have this void, this vacuum, that you recognize all day, every day.

James, your mom and dad knew Christina a little bit and I know you knew her. She was a lot of fun. She could take ordinary events and fill them up with more joy than you anticipated would come from those



things. So, in my grieving there is an absence of the joy that she brought to the mundane. And I learned from her over the years how to try to do that.

An example: when our first born, Benn, was very little we were coming to Ascension, and we eventually were able to get Benn into childcare during the service. When the children came back into the service and he found us, Christina would always greet him as if he had been kidnapped and she hadn't seen him in 5 years. "Benn!!!" she would exclaim and throw her arms around him and give him a huge squish. And she taught me to value those daily interactions and celebrate them in a way that I didn't know how to before her. But her absence now kind of robs those events of that specialness. She made Benn, Emily and Sam feel like the most important, celebrated little people in the world. Not in a way that they were better than others, but in the way that this fully grown human being was ecstatic to see them all the time. It was wonderful to witness the whole process of her pouring her life into theirs.

The very long answer to your direct question about grief is: I'm not sure I have anything to say to other people who are experiencing grief except, "I'll walk with you. And we'll figure out what your individual story is together."

JAMES: I think maybe the church doesn't recognize ongoing grief. We are good at crisis for a while, then fade out.

JIM: When it comes to ongoing grieving or suffering, I think many of us can get tired of the same thing over and over again. For someone who is in a situation of distress or difficulty, that can go on for months or years, the freshness and uniqueness has long ceased to exist for the rest of us, and we are somehow not as sympathetic to, or aware of, the fact that it never changes for that person. They continue to experience it daily as a fresh or at least as a chronic experience.

The only analogy I can draw is this: The story of Jacob in scripture, where he comes to a place where he says he didn't know God was there. He wrestles and struggles with the angel and during the physical confrontation his hip is dislocated. He recovers from the emotional, physical, and theological struggle that he has at that moment in time. But we are told that he limped into the sunrise, and he likely limped the rest of his life. That sign of his struggle with God marked him for the rest of his life.

Christina departed in a totally unexpected and somewhat shocking way, and emotionally I still limp from that. I suspect I always will. I don't think that's ever going to be

different.

Here's how the church can deal with the long-term aspect of that. The church in its best expression recognizes the catastrophic consequences of the really horrible things that happen to people and we don't try to pretend they don't exist. We don't try to hold them at arm's length as if they are not a part of our lives. They are part of everybody's life. And the church is one of the very few places in the world where we acknowledge that yes, this is part of what you must grapple with! In that sense, ongoing grieving or suffering is baked into the way we look at our lives, as individuals and in community. We may not be very good at articulating support, but we are conscious of other folks' suffering. Whether we can walk with them in a way that's helpful is another question.

JAMES: I'd like to walk with others better. I want to write something about lament for the lent issue of Ascent. Then talk with people about their laments in these interviews. I think we don't balance lament and joy publicly well.

JIM: Let me tell you who helps me with the balance - my son Benn. When his mom died, Benn expressed at that time that the pain he felt was just the flip side of the joy that he experienced every day when his mom was with him. And if you're going to have one, you're going to

have the other. Two expressions of love: joy and suffering, both integral to each other. He helps me with that. The suffering we now experience is the evidence of the love and joy we were blessed with for three decades.

I feel like lament is a bit like a chronic illness - you know you've got it and you're going to live with it. So how are you going to live with it? Is it going to be the apparel that you put on every day for the whole world to see, or not? I would rather not - I have much to be thankful for and good things and friends to celebrate so I'd rather not mourn publicly every day. But I think that people can be helped if they understand lament as an integral part of their lives. Which is, of course, part of the function of making yourself vulnerable to other people. If I know that something difficult is happening to someone, I need to embrace walking through whatever that difficult thing is that's happening to them. The church embraced walking through Christina's 30 days in the hospital powerfully. Clergy and lay people - we had tons of support. She wasn't Dr. Todd Wahrenberger's patient, but he was there twice a day, every day, to check on her and to translate for us what was going on.

Lament is the toll we pay for being vulnerable, and it is the price of loving others, and being loved.

JAMES: I loved her so much. She gave me joy.

JIM: When talking about you, she said to me more than once - "I'm telling you, there is a ton going on inside there, we just have to figure out a way for him to get it out." And here I sit in this exchange with you.

JAMES: I'd like my column to do two things: one is to help people know each other in the church. The other is to help people know they are not alone if their lives are imperfect or painful or if their bodies are giving them trouble.

JIM: I think one of the things your column does that is really fabulous is that it reinforces the idea that every Sunday, we sit in the pew next to people who are really interesting, who have really compelling stories to share and that if you only knew that person (in the way you are helping us know them), we would be more celebratory. We'd be saying, "Oh there's that person, and I find it incredibly interesting what James told me about her overcoming XYZ." It's so incredibly helpful to know that the people we have known casually are so much more interesting and complex and worthy of attention than our surface understanding. You're performing a great service.

Just the presence of the column itself bears witness to grace. It's rock-solid evidence of grace. It's my favorite thing to read every time the Ascent comes — who am I going to meet this time?

JAMES: I love doing it. I've learned so much about God's grace through pain.

JIM: One of the difficult truths of our experiences as people slouching towards the kingdom of God is that you seem to grow more through painful experiences than any other way. I don't know why that is, but in the economy of the kingdom, suffering and difficulty seem to produce more fruit than anything else. I wish it weren't so. But you know redemption wasn't accomplished with a banana split.

JAMES: I think suffering people are so deep. People are so nice about the column, but of course they wouldn't tell me the bad stuff if they didn't like it. But I like it!

JIM: I hope you know that you are now ministering to a congregation of 600 or 700 people. The column isn't a novelty act. It's ministry to people - It's a way of helping all of us see each other in ways we hadn't before. So, thank you very much for what you're doing.

JAMES: I want to be a minister. I don't think my path will be typical so I'm figuring it out.

JIM: I'm happy to be able to observe the figuring-out process. I don't mean to keep circling back to Christina, but every time you take the offering up during the 11am service, I feel as if she's there, smiling that smile. Chris proposed that someone from the disability group take the offering up, and despite some initial resistance she just went ahead and did it, and people have celebrated it ever since.

JAMES: I mess up a lot, but it's fun. This is your big moment Jim, any thoughts for the parish?

JIM: You asked me about grieving and if I had any advice - and the harsh reality is that I don't. I wish I had a helpful slogan or a more direct insight into the process of lamentation, but I can only refer you to books on the topic and offer personal encouragement. Also, regarding the parish, more than any another time that I've been here, there is so much going on and there are just so many people I don't know. I'm overwhelmed in a very good way.

I was apprehensive about the deficit in 2024. When the senior warden stood up in early 2025 and said we met the budget - when we were \$380,000 short at the end of November - I found that to be a tremendous affirmation of the selection of the new rector and the direction of the transition. It's a blessing from God and an affirmation from the parish that we want to keep going in the direction we are going.

I also can't get past Peter and Shannon unplugging from their home community and coming to Pittsburgh - I mean, it's no San Diego! I think they are both 'off the charts' in likability!

PALM SUNDAY

April 13 | 9am & 11am



MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 17 | 7:00pm



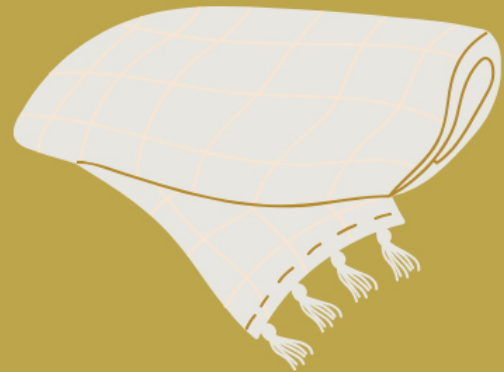
GOOD FRIDAY

April 18 | 12:00pm



EASTER SUNDAY

April 20 | 6am, 9am & 11am



Worship Services **Sunday 9:00 am, 11:00 am Nave Services** with [YouTube](#) live stream.

Website www.ascensionpittsburgh.org

Address 4729 Ellsworth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Phone/Fax (412) 621-4361 / (412) 621-5746

About The Ascent *The Ascent* is published by Church of the Ascension.
Marilyn Chislaghi, Editor
Kristen Parise, Publisher



A Worshipping Community;
Equipping God's People; Sharing
Christ's Healing with a Broken World