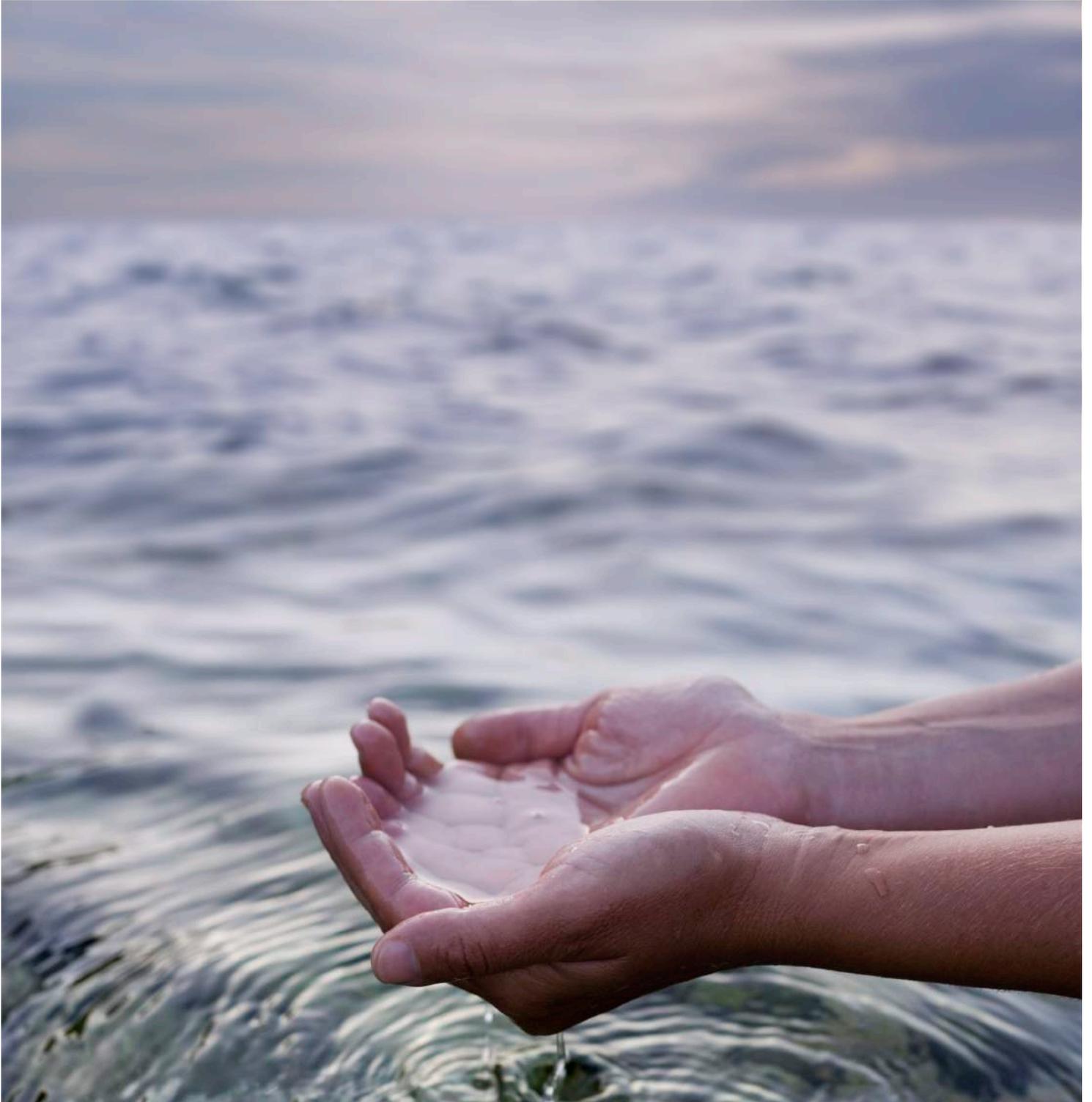


STILL POINT

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LENTEN AND EASTER SEASONS

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LET US BEGIN AGAIN *Our Lenten Journey*

Let us Begin Again: Returning to God with Our Whole Heart

As he was nearing his death, St. Francis of Assisi said, Let us begin again, for until now, we have done nothing. St. Francis understood that conversion is never a single moment but a lifelong journey. Life itself is a season of seasons. We never begin at the beginning, but from where we are now, with all of life's lessons, wisdom, and hurts.

The season of Lent provides us an opportunity "to begin again" and to refocus our attention on our call to be messengers of the Good News of God's love. Every year, every day, every moment, we have the opportunity to pause and to "return to God with our whole heart." [cf Joel 2:12]. Lent is an invitation to turn away from our defiance, abandon our self-interest, and let go of our sense of privilege in favor of recognizing our solidarity with all who suffer and grieve, including our hurting planet. (Bruce Epperly, *Messy Incarnation*)

Sr. Linda Buck writes, "The process toward wholeness is never complete in our lifetime. The continual movement toward wholeness is our witness to the paschal mystery alive in our world.... It is God, as Creator, who moves us toward regeneration and wholeness." (*Hope in Suffering: The Spirituality of Life and Loss* workshop paper)

We must constantly renew our commitment to following the Gospel and drawing closer to God. May your Lenten journey be filled with grace and many opportunities to "begin again."

- *Covenant Companion Jeanne Connolly*
Wheaton Franciscans



WISDOM MANTRAS FOR THE LENTEN JOURNEY

Introduction

The first twelve-step program (designed for alcoholics) was developed in the 1930s. Today, however, there are many variations of this wellness curriculum which help people suffering from a variety of issues. The 12 Steps may also be useful to those surrounded by difficult situations. For example, Al-Anon is a program for individuals who are affected by another's drinking. Participants come together for mutual support. As members share their experience, strength, and hope they find it is possible to improve upon the hardships they encounter in life.

People working a 12 Step recovery program use many tools, both personally and collectively. Some of these

include the 12 Steps, meetings, literature, sponsorship, The Serenity Prayer, and slogans. At first glance the slogans may just seem like familiar clichés. When considered thoughtfully, however, these anchoring phrases can become wisdom mantras. In this reflection series we will explore some Al-Anon phrases in the context of our Lenten Journey.

There is no right or wrong way to apply a 12 Step phrase to one's spiritual enrichment. We might use a phrase as a prayer, repeat the phrase to center ourselves in a challenging moment, or meditate upon a phrase we feel drawn to for a period of time. However we choose to use these wisdom mantras, we are likely to uncover a power that is transformational.

by Tammy Winn

ASH WEDNESDAY

One Day at a Time

Here we are at another Ash Wednesday, the entrance to a fresh Lenten journey. We may set goals for how we aim to spend the next 40 days, with fasting, abstaining, and almsgiving. Whatever our intentions are for this holy season, we would do well to remember that every objective can only be met ***One Day at a Time*** — sometimes by even just one hour, or one minute, or one second at a time.

Living ***One Day at a Time*** is counter-cultural. However, it is the only way to maintain serenity. Sometimes we focus on the past, replaying the mental videos of disappointments, mistakes, and grievances. This can lead to depression. Sometimes we worry about the future, anticipating disasters or worst outcomes. The result is often anxiety. The truth is, however, we are powerless over both past and future. Instead, put the past on the shelf and honor it for the gifts of learning it has held. Set aside the future for the experiences not yet ready to be

revealed. Settle into this moment for all it has to offer, choosing to live ***One Day at a Time***.

We may be in a season of difficulty, our souls weary from ongoing struggles. How are we to ignore regrets and concerns when they loom overhead? We can accept the limitations of today, knowing that we are able to only manage the present. We have the option to surrender all that overwhelms us to a loving Higher Power.

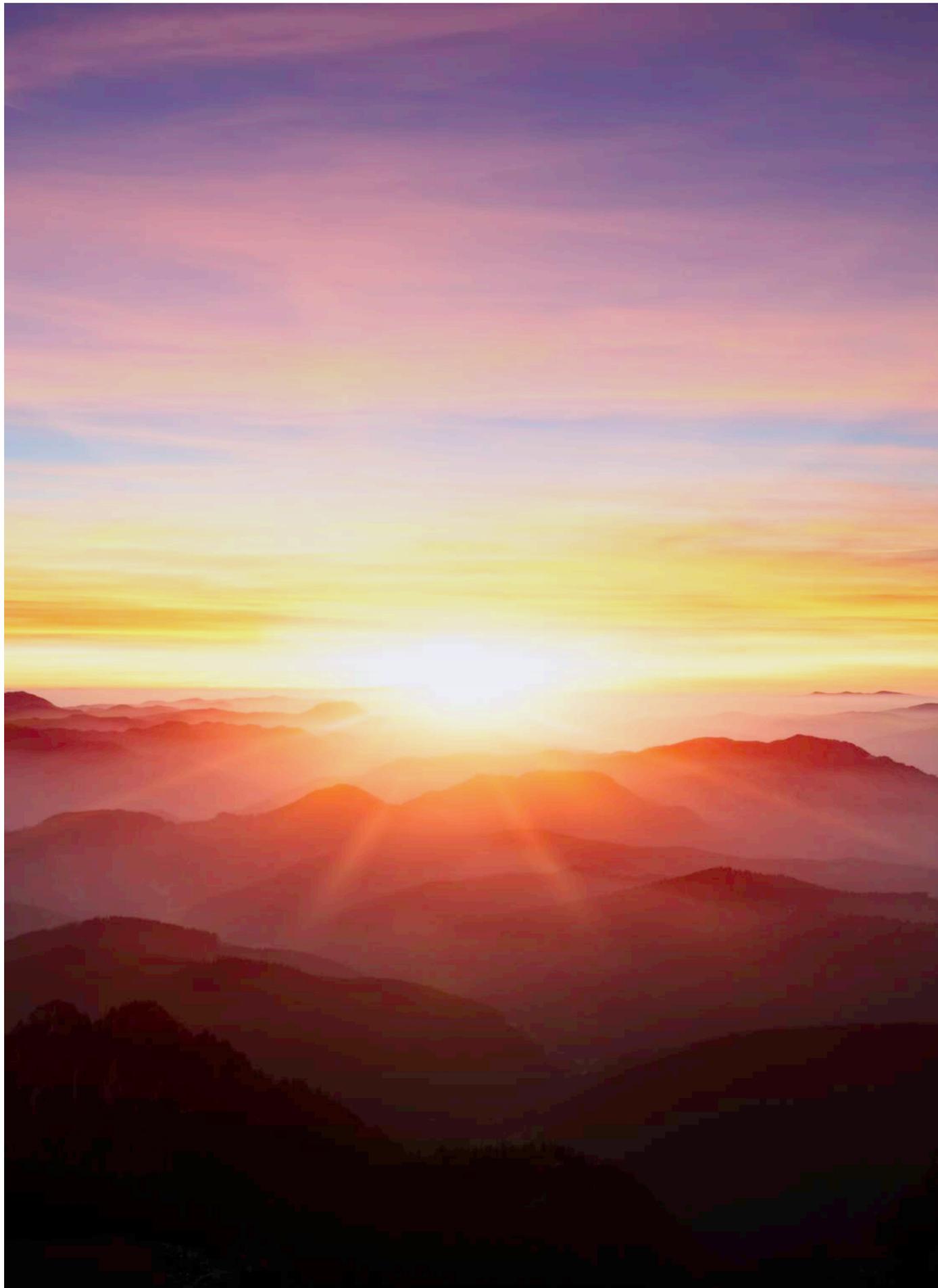
Perhaps we are in a season of ease and joy. Here too living ***One Day at a Time*** reminds us to pause and savor the blessings before us. In fully experiencing the good times when they happen, we replenish our energy. As a result, we may be able to share hope with another.

During Lent let us commit to living ***One Day at a Time***. Experience what a difference it can make.

“This day is all I have to work with, and it is all I need. If I am tempted to worry about tomorrow’s concerns, I will gently bring my mind back to today.”

— *Courage to Change*, p. 10





FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

First Things First

Lent is a time to rekindle our connection with the Divine. We are able to maximize this opportunity by keeping ***First Things First***. This means tending to whatever might be out of balance in ourselves, including our prayer life.

Opening up an intentional conversation with Spirit this Lent could help us discover what blocks us from peace. In this dialogue with God we might consider listening more than speaking. Our Higher Power may then gently remind us what is and is not ours to manage.

Too often we forget to keep ***First Things First***. We overlook the need for prayer at the times we need it most. Yet contact with a Higher Power is crucial to our well-being. By prioritizing our spiritual health we move closer to serenity.

During Lent let us commit to putting ***First Things First***. Experience what a difference it can make.

“As I think about what to do with this day, I will set aside some time for what is really important. I will put first things first today.”

— *Courage to Change*, p. 318

DIVINE

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Listen and Learn

The beauty of liturgical seasons such as Lent is that we are reminded to set some time aside to reflect and clear out what is not life-giving. In this process we might open ourselves up to **Listen and Learn**. So long as we are alive we can grow in the understanding of something new each day. This helps us evolve into a better version of ourselves and thus contribute to a positive change in the world.

When encountering parts of our lives that trouble us, often in the form of people with whom we disagree, we can peacefully approach the dilemma with our ears. If we take time to drop our defenses and really listen, we just might learn something about them and about ourselves. Authentic listening leads to learning which lends itself to loving more widely.

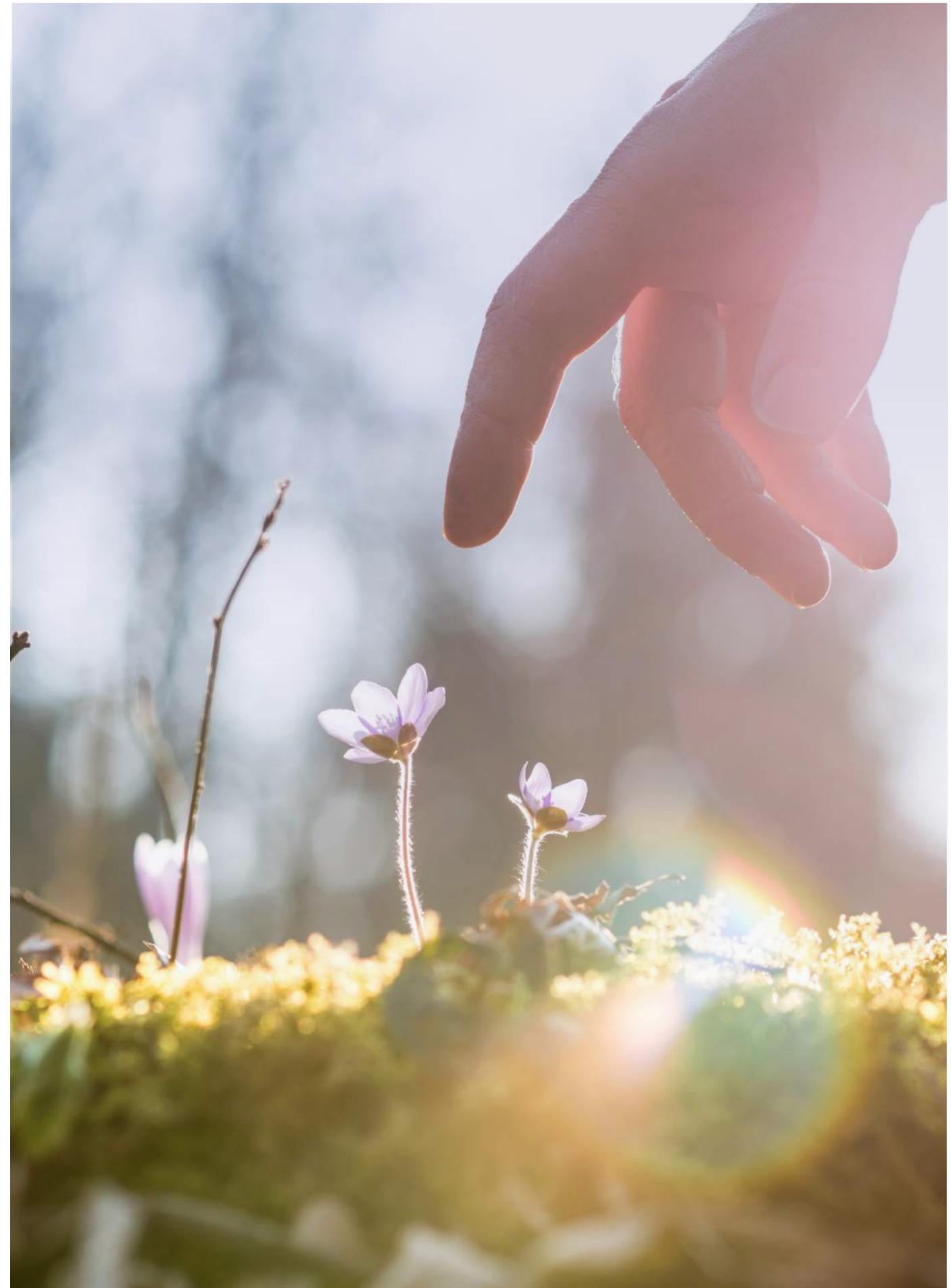
To **Listen and Learn** is a form of healing for everyone involved. All we need to do is to be present and enter into another's experience. We do not listen with a preoccupation to change someone else. Rather, we offer genuine compassion that allows safe space for the soul to appear. It is then that we are changed.

“There isn't anyone you couldn't love once you've heard their story,” as the quotation by Mary Lou Kownacki says. By taking the time to **Listen and Learn** we reorient ourselves once again toward Love.

During Lent let us commit to **Listen and Learn**. Experience what a difference it can make.

“The more available I am to listen and learn, the more available I am to be healed by my Higher Power.”

— *Hope for Today*, p.16





THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

How Important Is It?

During Lent we have an opportunity to hone in on what really matters. In doing so there is a peeling away of what does not really matter. When confronted with something that makes a bid for our time, energy, or peace of mind, we would be wise to take a breath and ask **How Important Is It?**

Certain situations in life are bound to ruffle our feathers. Egos get triggered easily, tempting us to express ourselves in a knee-jerk reaction. Too often we lose perspective and allow minor inconveniences to steal our joy. If we put a little space between the matter at hand and our reaction to it by asking **How Important Is It?**, we will start to interrupt old patterns of creating unnecessary drama. We will come to realize that our effort could be better used another way.

Life does hand us moments of urgency and times of actual crisis, but most of our day to day living is not experienced at that level of intensity. When we learn to distinguish what is important from what is not, we begin letting go of the small stuff. This frees up time to appreciate the many pleasures of today. Thus, we become better stewards of our inner resources.

During Lent let us commit to asking **How Important is it?** Experience what a difference it can make.

“How easily do I give away my serenity?”

— *Hope for Today*, p.302

SERENITY

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Progress Not Perfection

Lent offers us a journey more than it does a destination. It is a necessary passage that forms us to become a people of resurrection. In this season of Lent we may take inventory of how well we are living as Jesus taught us to live. It is easy to be hard on oneself for not getting things “right,” or for experiencing setbacks. The goal of spiritual growth and healing, however, is **Progress Not Perfection**.

Keeping focused on progress reminds us that one step at a time in the right direction is enough. We make mistakes. We are human. Yet we also are capable to make some improvement in our lives, however small it may be. With a **Progress Not Perfection** mindset we center on forward motion rather than unrealistic ideals. This gives us the encouragement we need to keep going.

Concentrating on **Progress Not Perfection** may also help us to release fear. Perhaps we have fallen and need the courage to get up and start over. If we let go of the notion of perfect, we can become ready to begin again.

During Lent let us commit to practicing **Progress Not Perfection**. Experience what a difference it can make.

“I may not recognize it right now, but I have made progress, and I continue to make progress with every step I take.”

— *Courage to Change*, p. 292

JOURNEY





FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Attraction Rather Than Promotion

Lent is a time set aside to deepen our faith life. Feelings of growth and renewal could make us eager to share what is new and uplifting for us. Perhaps the best way to do so is by **Attraction Rather Than Promotion**. We do not need to tell others how we have changed. Rather, living out what has shifted in the self is often the best course.

“Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words” comes to mind when living out **Attraction Rather Than Promotion**. If we are truly transformed in any way for the better, it follows that this change would be made evident in our behavior. The difference in us ought to be perceptible. There is no need to lecture. Let any light discovered offer a gentle invitation for another to experience a metanoia of their own.

During Lent let us lead with **Attraction Rather Than Promotion**. Experience what a difference it can make.

“When my life improves as a result of working the program myself, I do more to carry the message than I ever could by forcing it on others.”

— *Courage to Change*, p. 36

FAITH LIFE

PALM SUNDAY

Let Go and Let God

Holy Week brings the Lenten journey to an inevitable point of surrender and sorrow. Whether a part of our lives is on the cross or we are witnessing death unfolding, the powerlessness of the human experience is evident. In moments of such awareness we may find some relief by intentionally releasing our heartache to a Higher Power. **Let Go and Let God** is helpful in reminding us that all is not within our control and we are not alone.

Jesus, as would any of us, begged God to take away his suffering. Ultimately he gave up resistance and allowed Grace to take its course. You might say he **Let Go and Let God**. Acceptance of such unimaginable pain revealed a path toward new life.

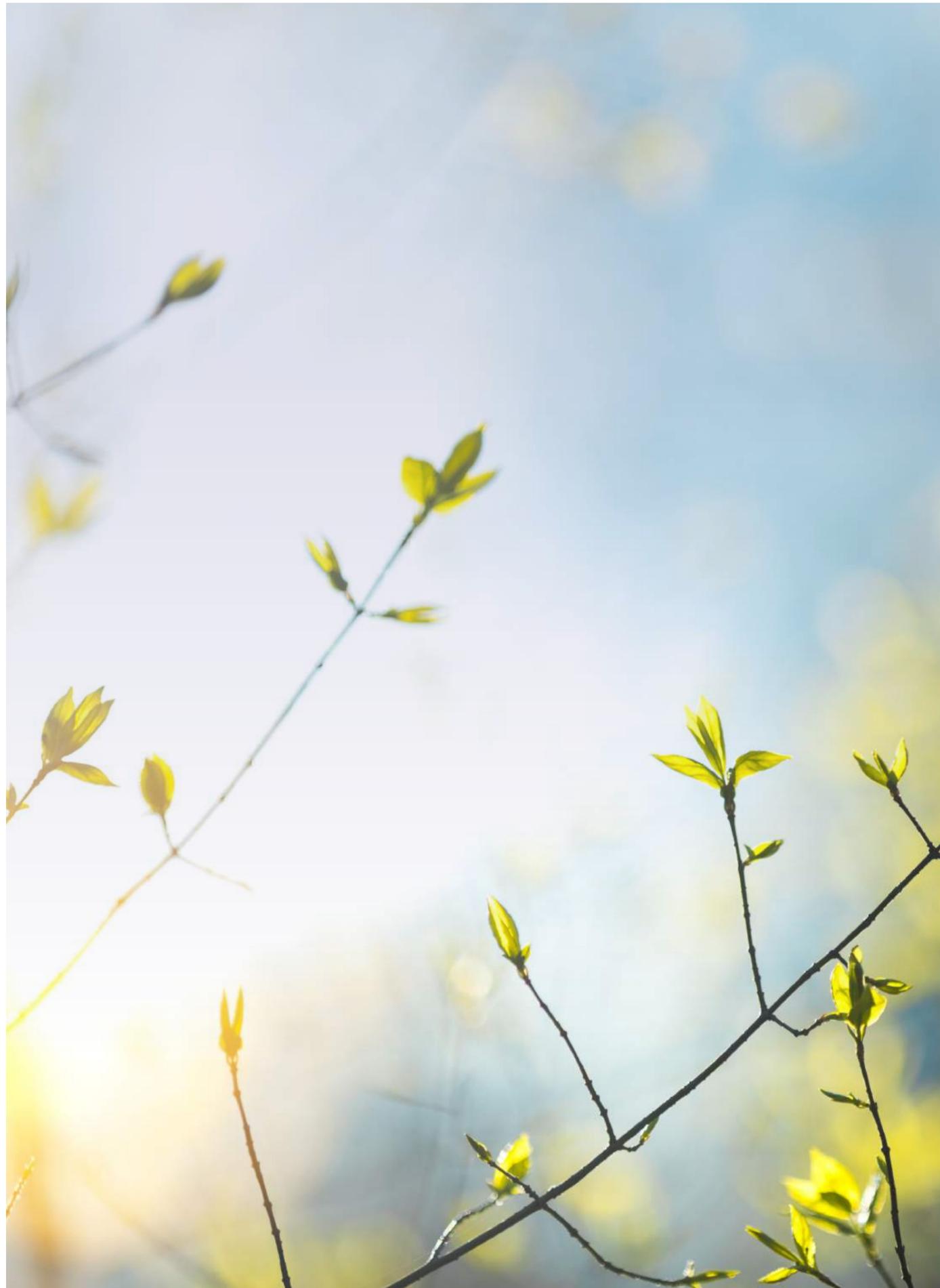
During Holy Week let us try to **Let Go and Let God**. Experience what a difference it can make.

“When I can finally persuade myself to let go of a problem that has been tormenting me, solutions begin to unfold that I never dreamed were possible.”

— *One Day at A Time in Al-Anon*, p. 10

LET GO





EASTER SUNDAY

Let it Begin with Me

God's "one-in-being-ness" presented to us through the life of Jesus is not a mere experience that humankind once witnessed, rather it is an invitation. We are invited to develop our Christ nature, to live out the bold Love Jesus modeled. Here the anchoring phrase **Let it Begin with Me** makes for a great prayer.

The irony of the Gospel is that after putting all of our stock in Jesus as the Messiah we find that God, through

Jesus, has put all of his stock in us. In other words, the work of resurrection is ours to continue. How can we bring new life to the death that surrounds us? How can we lift up our families and communities? How can we renew society and revitalize the church? The answer is simple, **Let it Begin with Me.**

During Easter Season **Let it Begin with Me.** Experience what a difference it can make.

"By changing myself, I truly can change the world."

— *Courage to Change*, p. 337

BEGIN

POETRY OF EASTER

Morning Poem

by Mary Oliver

Every morning
the world
is created.
Under the orange
sticks of the sun
the heaped
ashes of the night
turn into leaves again
and fasten themselves to
the high branches—
and the ponds appear
like black cloth
on which are painted
islands
of summer lilies.
If it is your nature
to be happy
you will swim away along
the soft trails
for hours, your
imagination
alighting everywhere.
And if your spirit
carries within it

the thorn
that is heavier than
lead—
if it's all you can do
to keep on trudging—

there is still
somewhere deep within
you
a beast shouting that
the earth
is exactly what it
wanted—

each pond with its
blazing lilies
is a prayer heard and
answered
lavishly,
every morning,

whether or not
you have ever dared to be
happy,
whether or not
you have ever dared to
pray.

Swan

by Mary Oliver

Did you too see it, drifting, all night, on the black river?
Did you see it in the morning, rising into the silvery air —
An armful of white blossoms,
A perfect commotion of silk and linen as it leaned
into the bondage of its wings; a snowbank, a bank of lilies,
Biting the air with its black beak?
Did you hear it, fluting and whistling
A shrill dark music — like the rain pelting the trees — like a waterfall
Knifing down the black ledges?
And did you see it, finally, just under the clouds —
A white cross Streaming across the sky, its feet
Like black leaves, its wings Like the stretching light of the
river?
And did you feel it, in your heart, how it pertained to
everything?
And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for?
And have you changed your life?

"LENT IS A TIME
of going very deeply into ourselves...
What is it that stands between us and God?
Between us and our brothers and sisters?
Between us and life, the life of the Spirit?
Whatever it is, let us relentlessly tear it out,
without a moment's hesitation."

— *Catherine Doherty*



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