

FELLOWSHIP *of* PRAYER 2018
LENT DEVOTIONAL

FOLLOWING the WAY

Edited by

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Written by

**The Ecumenical and Disciple Bethany Fellows
(current & alumni)**



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Dear Readers,

We are so glad you have chosen to walk the Lenten journey alongside us this year, utilizing this devotional. This book is written by a collection of young pastors who are gifted by the Bethany Fellowships. You can read more about the Bethany Fellowships and the future of “church” at the back of this book. In this devotional we have prepared a reading for each day of the Lenten season and hope it can be a guide for you as you journey along “the way” with God over the next several weeks.

In his book *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, Parker J. Palmer shares his experience of searching for a new direction, a new way. In his search, he visits Pendle Hill, “a community rooted in prayer, study, and a vision of human possibility,” where he is guided to simply “Have faith...and way will open.” After much discernment, waiting, and frustration, that way had not yet opened for him, but then a woman named Ruth opened his eyes to the possibility that perhaps “way” would not open clearly in front of him, but that “a lot of way has closed behind me, and that’s had the same guiding effect.”

As followers of Christ, each of us is following “way”; the earliest Christians were referred to as “followers of the way,” and the prophet Isaiah spoke of what it would take to prepare the way for the arrival of God’s anointed one. A focus on the way of Jesus as laid out in John’s Gospel helps us to follow in his footsteps and see both his choices and priorities; reminders from Isaiah help us to see that the way of Christ is rooted in justice.

We are in this journey together, yet the experience of following “way” can be very different for each person. It is our hope that the voices of many different pastors from different contexts, denominations, and life experiences will help you to find your own place on the road. You can use this resource alone or in a group, at the same time of day or whenever you find a free and quiet moment—what matters most is that you make the time to read, reflect, and pray.

Join us this Lent as we use passages from the book of Isaiah and the Gospel of John to follow the way: the way to the Lord, the way of Jesus, the way to the cross...the way to new life.

Blessings on your journey,

— *Nannette Banks, Laura Ann Phillips, and Lara Blackwood Pickrel, editors, and the Bethany Fellowship Writing Team*

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

The Light with You

Read John 12:27–36a

Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you.”
(John 12:35a)

I was walking the path at the zoo when it led me to the building marked “Nocturnal Animals.” When I entered, I was immediately blinded by darkness and my feet froze. “Keep walking,” my friend urged from behind me. “Your eyes will adjust.” And, they did. In just a matter of seconds, my eyes found the sources of light in the room—much dimmer than the bright sunshine outside, but light nonetheless—and I could see again.

In this passage from John, Jesus warns his disciples of the darkness that looms ahead. However, he also offers them glimmers of light. In the shadow of an anguished Jesus, we hear a voice glorifying God’s name. In the shadow of the day of judgment, we are promised that one day all people will be brought together. In the shadow of a prediction about his death, we are also told that Jesus will be lifted up—that death will not have the final word.

On our journey of following Jesus, there are certainly dark days when our own prayers are anguished and judgment and death feel all-too-near. But, the gospel reassures us that, even in these times, light will be left along the path for us—in the example of Jesus, in voices that glorify God’s name, in the children of light who journey with us. “Keep walking,” we are urged. “Your eyes will adjust.”

Prayer: Light of the World, in moments of darkness, help me to look for signs of your light, your presence, your hope in the world. Teach me to be a light for others, so that darkness will not overwhelm us. Amen.

Katie Russell

EASTER SUNDAY EVENING, APRIL 1

I Will Give Thanks

Read Psalm 118:21–29

O give thanks to the LORD, for [God] is good, for [God's] steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 118:29)

There's something peaceful about the evening of Easter Sunday, a moment of quiet blessing and even relaxation. At this point, all the action of Holy Week is over. The cross is down, the tomb is empty, the garden is quiet. Christ is risen indeed.

For those who took a Lenten discipline upon themselves, they are now reveling in the end of their particular fast—savoring that first bite of chocolate in six weeks, logging back on to Facebook, turning the TV on once again. The evening of Easter Sunday—after Lent is over, after church services are complete, after family obligations have been fulfilled—is almost a relief.

But this is not the end.

Now is the time that we begin to build on the cornerstone that was rejected. Tomorrow will be the day that the Lord has made, and so we will rejoice in it.

Whatever connection you have made with your faith during Lent, new or renewed, may it continue to sustain you throughout the Easter season and the weeks and months to follow. It is this connection to your faith that will give you the strength to go forth each day and declare, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

You are blessed from the house of the Lord.

Prayer: O God, may your light shine within us. May your work continue among us. May our faith be sustained in this Eastertide, that we may always extol you. We give thanks to you, Lord, for you are good, for your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.

Jimmy Gawne

List of Contributors

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Bethany Fellows
Prepare to Lead

Bethany Fellowships

For over eighteen years, the Bethany Fellowships has been encouraging young pastors in their earliest years of ministry. This ministry was born out of the intention of strengthening congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by helping newly ordained, young pastors transition from seminary to sustained congregational ministry with a strong and healthy pastoral identity. Research indicated one third of young ministers might leave congregational ministry in their first five years. The good news is that Bethany Fellowships is helping to change that reality for Disciples pastors and congregations.

In the fall of 2014 a Bethany Fellows ecumenical group launched, serving the same purpose, but to a wider group of young ministers, from a variety of denominations. Today Bethany Fellows celebrates the Disciples Bethany Fellows, Ecumenical Bethany Fellows, as well as a similar ministry for those engaged in campus ministry and chaplaincy.

Bethany Fellowships is in partnership with the Pension Fund, facilitating the peer group component of the Pension Fund's Excellence in Ministry program. The Excellence in Ministry pilot program seeks to reduce or alleviate some of the key financial pressures that inhibit effective pastoral leadership of early career ministers, and improve the financial literacy and management skills of those leaders through education.

The Bethany Fellowships ministry provides four years of support and encouragement by offering two retreats each year and helping young pastors develop a rhythm of spiritual practices and patterns for a lifetime of ministry. While on retreat, the Fellows receive the prayerful support of experienced pastors/mentors and the encouragement of significant collegial relationships. The retreats also include visits with dynamic congregations, fueling

creativity and insights to share with their congregations. Through the Bethany Fellowships, young ministers are better able to navigate the beginnings of a pastoral vocation, as well as crucial young adult life transitions, building confidence and strengthening leadership.

Since 1999 the Lilly Endowment has provided three consecutive “Transition into Ministry” grants, encouraging the initial development and maturing of the Bethany Fellowships. The grants have been serviced through the Office of General Minister and President and currently through HELM—Higher Education and Leadership Ministries of the Christian Church. Contributions for the future sustainability of this vital Disciples ministry can be made to the Christian Church Foundation (memo: *The Bethany Fellowships*), Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1986. More information can be found at www.bethanyfellows.org or by contacting Kim Gage Ryan, Co-Director, 573-489-2729.