

# ***Lent Reflections 2026***

*Some people take on some reflective readings for Lent.  
You can use these as journal prompts or for reflection &  
meditation.*

## **Week 1: February 22 - 28**

### **Love Turns The World Upside Down**

There's another problem when love becomes a mere sentiment. Love the sentiment – a nice feeling that rises up inside us – becomes love the sedative. It's a sweet thing that leaves us complacent and sleepy. No, the love I'm asking you to discover inside yourself, or reconnect to, is something fierce. This love is a verb: It's an action, with force and follow-through. When we pull love out of the abstract, really put it to work, it starts to reveal its extraordinary power.

Love as an action is the only thing that has ever changed the world for the better. Love is Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, and Josie Robbins. Love is a little girl in Pakistan named Malala Yousafzai standing up to armed men who said that girls shouldn't be educated. She was rescued and taken to England, where she could have retreated to a quiet life but instead made a commitment to spend her life working to improve other women's lives.

Love is Fannie Lou Hamer, whose contribution to the civil rights movement was honored on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2017, on the one hundredth anniversary of her birth. Fannie was one of twenty children. Her parents were two sharecroppers, de facto slaves. They were desperately poor. She had polio, but walking with a limp didn't stop her from picking cotton, so much cotton, in her teens. She dropped out of school to help her aging parents pick more cotton, because that's

what a sister does when the family has nineteen other siblings to feed.

In 1961, she went to a Sunflower County hospital for a minor surgery and was sterilized without her consent. Some people would have given up at that point, deciding that any society that would condone such a crime was irrevocably evil. Not Fannie – she was just getting started. Because one year later, she learned something she hadn't heard before: Black people had the right to register and vote in the United States. When she tried to do it in Ruleville, Mississippi, she failed the "literacy test", just one of the ways Whites have prevented Blacks from exercising their rights in our recent history. After that day, she never tired in her fight to right that wrong, surviving a KKK gunshot and the police beating her in prison. And despite the treatment she experienced at the hands of Whites, she never once backed down from the vision of the civil rights movement that had as its conclusion all good people living together as brothers and sisters, sharing the same welcoming table.

Love is equally the contribution of a woman like Frances Perkins, the secretary of labor who executed much of Roosevelt's New Deal. Perkins was born to a wealthy family. She could have gone to cotillion and then partied her life away. Instead, one day in 1911, when she was a young suffragette who had recently finished her master's in political science, she was walking in New York City's Washington Square Park with a friend when they heard screams. They followed the noise and saw men and women jumping out of the windows of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, which was on fire. Ultimately 146 workers, most of them women, lost their lives in the blaze. Forever changed, Frances put her privilege to work. She dedicated the rest of her life to lobbying to improve the lives of working people. She became the executive secretary for the Committee of Safety of the City of New

York to fight for safer working conditions. Then she went to Washington. Because Frances Perkins loved America's workers, we now have minimum wage and overtime laws, and a forty-hour workweek. She also broke ground in the White House, as our first woman cabinet member.

Love's power isn't any less when it's one individual serving another. I was stunned when I read in 2018 about the informal network of Americans who came together spontaneously in the weeks after the Trump administration's adoption of a "zero tolerance" immigration policy that led to children being separated from their parents at the border. These citizens raised money so that more than a dozen women could be released from detention. They offered their homes so these women would have a safe place to sleep each night on their journeys of thousands of miles to their children in New York. They contributed cars and their time to drive them one leg of the trip, from home to home to home. They shared clothing, food, and care. And because these good Samaritans loved their neighbors, these women were finally reunited in New York City with the children who had been stolen from them. "Listen, this is our job," Immigrant Families Together founder Meghan Finn told the *New York Times*. "This is our job because our government did something really heinous to these families, and [getting them home] isn't just about putting them on a bus."

Love is a firefighter running into a burning building risking his or her life for people he or she doesn't even know. Love is that first responder hurtling toward an emergency, a catastrophe, a disaster. Love is *someone* protesting anything that hurts or harms the children of God. Jesus said it this way, hours before his crucifixion: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's own life for one's friends."

Love is a commitment to seek the good and to work for the good and welfare of others. It doesn't stop at our front door or our neighborhood, our religion or race, or our state's or our country's border. This is one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth, as the hymn goes. It often calls us to step outside of what we thought our boundaries were, or what others expect of us. It calls for us to sacrifice, not because doing so feels good, but because it's the right thing to do.

*Love Is The Way.* Bishop Michael Curry. Avery. 2020. Pp. 19 – 23.

## **Week 2: March 1-7**

### **“He Then Rebuked the Wind ....,” or Find Calm**

Many things will happen at once. It will feel like a storm: an onslaught of terrifying developments, and interminable bombardment with threats from all sides, a nauseating cascade of news.

Mark tells the story of Jesus in the storm: “A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they work him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ And waking up, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Be silent! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm” (4:37-39).

It is not easy to stay calm in the storm. But it is necessary. Physical flooding will sweep you away as you're frantically trying to keep your head above water or cling to something. Emotional flooding will immobilize you in the face of what overwhelms. Both responses are understandable, but they work against you.

Don't let the storm control your emotions.  
Don't let the storm direct your response.

This storm is not a natural catastrophe. It is an intentional strategy. It is meant to shock and awe, to overwhelm and debilitate, to create panic and scatter energy. The projection of unstoppable power will be self-fulfilling if you let it.

Don't let it.

Worship and obedience are not the only ways to empower evil. Evil draws power from attention. Evil draws power from fear.

Don't give it more power.

Lot's wife turning around to behold the devastation was enough to permanently immobilize her. Don't ignore or sugarcoat what is happening. But don't let it mesmerize you. Don't let it take your eyes off the road.

In his prison camp, Dietrich Bonhoeffer mused:

"I often notice hereabouts how few people there are who can harbor many different things at the same time. When bombers come, they are nothing but fear itself; when there is something good to eat, nothing but greed itself; when they fail to get what they want they become desperate; if something succeeds, that's all they'll see ... Everything, whether objective or subjective, disintegrates into fragments. Christianity, on the other hand, puts us into many different dimensions of life at the same time ... We weep with those who weep at the same time as we rejoice with those who rejoice. We fear – (I've just been interrupted again by the siren, so I'm sitting outdoors enjoying the sun) – for our lives, but at the same time we must think thoughts that are more important to us than our lives."

The storm is not an illusion; its dangers are real. Even so, it is also a distraction. No one can pay attention to all the things all the time. The highest waves raise your alarms – and may hide more inconspicuous but forceful blows. The

waves many or may not crush you, but focusing on them will keep you from attending to what matters most to you. Karl Barth advises, “a short, sharp glance suffices.”

Don't let the storm steal your focus.

No one can live in a constant state of emergency. Energy and attention are limited goods. When the absurd and atrocious become the everyday, two things happen: First, people desensitize. We run out of outrage. What would have created a panic yesterday elicits only a frown today.

Second, the craving for normalcy is so strong that people will tolerate, even demand, exceptional measures. Unbridled decision making without regard for process or legal constraints will feel like a relief rather than a threat.

Not strong enough to govern by majority and process, Hitler ruled by emergency decrees, which he gave out in rapid succession. An arson attack on the German parliament in January 1933 became his ticket to remove all checks on his powers: Dealing with the emergency demanded emergency powers. Within eighteen months, Hitler had abolished all remaining democratic institutions, “aligned” all organizations of civil life, withdrawn from the League of Nations, created the gestapo, and started purging the civil service of Jewish employees. Finally, he took out the assassination all remaining opposition in the ranks of his own party in the so-called Night of the Long Knives in June 1934.

Creating a state of emergency is a political strategy to gain unrestrained power. Don't fall for it.

At the height of the tumultuous integration of the German regional churches into a centralized *Reichskirche*, Karl Barth wrote a landmark essay titled “Theological Existence Today.” Today, he asserted, the task was “to do theology, and nothing but theology, as if nothing has happened.”

This demand raised eyebrows, then as much as now. Surely indifference is not the right response to the dismantling of civic life and democratic institutions?

But Barth neither advocated for indifference nor did he practice it. He played an important role in the Confessing Church, which declared the Hitler-devout German Christians a heresy and created their own parallel structures in resistance to Nazi co-optation. Barth lost his position, was prohibited from publishing and public speaking, and was forced to leave the country. From Switzerland, he would soon urge other nations that fighting against Hitler meant to fight “for the church of Jesus Christ.” Aged fifty-four, he even volunteered to serve in the Swiss reserve forces. And the essay itself did not advocate for indifference but engaged with different factions in his church, finding all of them theologically lacking in their resistance to the forced integration.

But Barth understood something that might be worth remembering today: Totalitarianism is about total control. It wants to control not just the public but also the private spaces. Not just politics and economics and education and religion, but also your thoughts and feelings. It does not need your love; your fear is enough.

Keeping your focus, feelings, and thoughts your own is hard. But it is itself an act of resistance.

Be strategic with your attention.

Knowing that a storm is brewing will allow you to be prepared. Losing sight of the horizon under crashing waves won't. Checking your social media feed every hour will not help you. Having spaces and times free from it will.

Follow the news, but limit your exposure. Ask yourself: Am I gaining important information, or am I giving away

my attention? Am I focusing on what matters, or am I just getting dizzy?

Keeping some areas of life from the all-extending grasp is hard. But it generated spaces where other thoughts can be thought, other feelings can be felt, other priorities can reign than those dictated by emergencies real or staged.

If there is to be a life beyond totalitarianism, we must cultivate a life outside its grasp, even as we live within it.

*For Such A Time As This: An Emergency Devotional.*  
Hanna Reichel. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.  
pp. 9-13.

### **Week 3: March 8-14**

#### **Rachel Held Evans: Open Hands**

I resist it every time.

All the way down the aisle and up the steps to the altar I fidget, folding and unfolding my arms, clasping and unclasping my hands, forcing my mouth into a pleasant, inconspicuous smile as my eyes greet the faces of the congregants who have gone before me.

There is organ and choir and stifled coughs and babies' cries.

There is incense and hair spray and old church and cheap perfume.

My knees hit the pillow beneath the altar rail and light from the stained glass dapples my skin. It's as vulnerable a posture as a body can assume: kneeling, hands cupped together and turned out – expectant, empty, exposed – waiting to receive. I resist it every time, this childlike surrender, this public reification of *need*.

Prayer, at least, offers some protection with its clasped hands, bowed heads, closed eyes. But here at the table I am open, unsheltered. The lines on my palms are dry creek beds in a basin awaiting water. I am a little girl crouched beneath the spigot.

*The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven.*

Jesus descends into my open hands.

*The Blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation.*

Jesus slips in, through my parted lips.

“If we did nothing else,” writes Nora Gallagher, “if nothing was placed in our hands, we would have done two-thirds of what needed to be done. Which is to admit that we simply do not have all the answers; we simply do not have all the power. It is, as the saying goes, ‘out of our hands.’”

“Faith,” she says, “is a catch-and-release sport. And standing at the altar receiving the bread and wine is the release part.”

But I’m no good at the releasing and receiving, at least not without practice. Ours is a culture of achievement, of sufficiency, of bootstrap pulling and ladder climbing. We celebrate the winners, the leaders, the do-it-yourselfers. Like any good American, I like to wait until I think I’ve *earned*. I like to wait until I think I’ve *deserved*. With giving, I can maintain some sense of power, some illusion of control. But receiving means the gig is up. Receiving means I’m not the boss of what comes into life – be it trial or trouble or unmerited good.

A writer friend of mine recently sent me a bouquet of orchids that sat on our dining room table for weeks in a perpetual explosion of magenta. She sent them because she knew I was in one of those seasons when I wanted little to do with God and nothing to do with the church. Christians had been cruel to one another and cruel to me, and it had all

happened in a public forum. I was in no mood to accept any acts of mercy, particularly from the very sort of Christians against whom I was revolting. Embarrassed by her generosity, I sent a quick thank-you in response and resolved to return the favor sometime. If I owed her, maybe I wouldn't have to let her in.

I was in possession of my friend's gift long before I received it, on a gray day when its stubborn, irresponsible beauty could no longer be ignored. Until then, I didn't want to admit how badly I needed her kindness, how helpless I was at sorting all this out on my own. I didn't want to see myself in those fragile, thirsty orchids, fighting against the gloom to trestle toward the light.

But this friend knows better than most the nature of *eucharisteo* – thanksgiving – how it enters through our soft spots and seeps in through our cracks. She knew God would unclench my fists and unfurl my fingers and that grace would eventually get through.

And so it did, when I finally opened my hands, when I received grace the way I receive communion, with nothing to offer back but thanks.

“Grace cannot prevail,” writes Robert Farrar Capon, “until our lifelong certainty that someone is keeping score has run out of steam and collapsed.”

This is why I need the Eucharist.

I need the Eucharist because I need to begin each week with open hands.

I need the Eucharist because I need to practice letting go and letting in.

I need the Eucharist because I need to quit keeping score.

“No one has been ‘worthy’ to receive communion,” writes Alexander Schmemmann, “no one has been prepared for it. At this point all merits, all righteousness, all devotions disappear and dissolve. Life comes again to us as Gift, a free and divine gift. ... Everything is free, nothing is due and yet all is given. And, therefore, the greatest humility and obedience is to accept the gift, to say yes – in joy and gratitude.”

It's a scary thing to open your hands. It's a scary thing to receive, to say yes. I resist it every time. But somehow, whether it sneaks in through a piece of bread, a sip of wine, or a hatching bud, grace always, eventually gets through. And finally, at long last, I exhale my thanksgiving.

Rachel Held Evans, Searching For Sunday, Nelson Books, 2015, pp. 142-145.

#### **Week 4: March 15-21**

##### **A Solution To The Problem Of Violence**

Fred [Rogers]' encouraging children to turn off scary TV was only the first step, in his mind. The next step was helping these same children (and their parents) to find appropriate ways to express their feelings, especially feelings of anger that can lead to the violence that scary TV often depicts. If you asked Fred for a psychological solution to the problem of violence, of hating your neighbor, he would sum it up in one word: *sublimation*.

A concept Fred likely learned in his graduate studies in child development, sublimation is the process by which socially unacceptable behaviors are channeled – sublimated – into more socially acceptable ways. The concept doesn't carry with it the idea that anger and violence can necessarily be eliminated, just that they can be diverted in ways that don't involve machine guns. Undesirable feelings or behaviors can be rerouted and released into

excelling in sports or contributing to the arts, for example. From a very young age, Fred turned to the piano as a way to express his anger.

Fred told me that sublimation was the key to his song, “What Do You Do (with the Mad That You Feel?)”. Through its lyrics he offers ways to redirect angry feelings: pounding clay, punching a bag, pounding dough, rounding up friends for a game of tag and running fast. “The world need to learn to know what to do with negative feelings,” he told me, explaining his motivation for writing the song. “It is so easy to pick up a gun and shoot somebody. It’s so much healthier – and so much more dramatic – to work out something interpersonally with somebody and to come to a resolution that means weal in both people’s life.” And children weren’t the only recipients of this message; Fred mentioned receiving mail from adults who told him that when they felt the urge to act out their anger in inappropriate ways, they remembered the words to his song and were able to stop themselves.

After her unacceptable paroxysm of anger in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, Lady Elaine learned to pound and then mold clay as a way to manage her angry feelings. Fred wanted children from the earliest age (and their parents too) to know there is a way to redirect angry feelings away from our natural inclination to turn our worlds upside down.

*The Simple Faith Of Mister Rogers. Amy Hollingsworth. Thomas Nelson. 2005. Pp. 95-96.*

## **Week 5: March 22 - 28**

### **“Do This in Remembrance of Me,” or Rehearse**

#### **Dangerous Memories**

It makes a difference which histories we remember and how we remember them. The pasts we narrate color our present and shape our future.

Pay attention to which names get attached to buildings and landscapes, and which are taken off.

Pay attention to which murals are painted over and which memorials are erected.

Memory is a tricky thing. It can fuel nostalgia, inertia, and reaction. But it can also give your love depth and your vision breadth. It can haunt the present with shame and blame, but also enrich it with gratitude and grief. It can engender feelings of powerlessness or renew agency. It has to be practiced consciously, or else it will gnaw away at your subconscious.

Practice memory intentionally, gently, communally. Absences constitute and haunt all community, and will assert their presence in its midst. Nowhere is this more blatantly disconcerting, and more confusingly comforting, than in the Last Supper.

“Do this in remembrance of me,” a Jesus anticipating his own death exhorts an intimate gathering of friends (1 Cor. 11:24; Luke 22:19). Soon, they will be brought even closer as they mourn his absence by ritually re-creating this scene. Now, the perfect presence is wrinkled by the inclusion of the one who will betray him. Judas sits at the table, puts his hand into the same bowl. Breaking bread with him, Jesus incorporates Judas into the body that the disciple breaks.

“Do this in remembrance of me.” Jesus invites you to commemorate his betrayal, death, and resurrection. His invitation makes space for “dangerous memory,” a memory that as post- Holocaust Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz tells us, “puts pressure on and questions our present because in it we remember an unfinished future.” Memory can unsettle the unreconciled present and open up a future for the hopeless and the forgotten, the failed and the oppressed.

Jesus invites you to perform such recollection of dangerous memory with your whole body, as a community: As you eat and drink and recount the stories, you re-member the body, putting the members of the body back together into a fellowship.

Re-member the body.

Remember horrors to create pathways to survival.

Remember inhumanity to make space for humanity.

Remember to hold accountable , remember to enable a different future.

Re-member. You are sustained and embraced.

Remembering keeps the ghosts alive so that they can warn and comfort, haunt and inspire the living: dangerous memories that push toward an unfinished future. Making the absent present allows for processing grief, strengthening commitments, and opening up vision. Such remembrance commits you to work for a future for those who have been forgotten, erased, and left behind.

Jews have long practiced dangerous memories, retelling the story of the exodus, a story of suffering and hope, of loss and promise. God liberates a people from enslavement, delivers them from the wilderness, and makes a way out of no way: life out of death. After Auschwitz, remembrance became the practice of insisting “never again”: “The premier demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not

happen again,” postulated Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Remember those who are absent. Remember those who have come before you, those who have left, and those who have been taken away. Recall their faces. Name their names. Tell their stories. Eat their foods. Dream their dreams. Weave their absence into your presence; it will thicken your social fabric. Their souls will nourish yours. Use memory to create empathy, not immunize yourself. Use memory to enlarge your capacity to feel, to care, and to dream. Use memory not to bind yourself to the past, but to make a future possible. “Never again” means “never again for anyone.”

*For Such A Time As This: An Emergency Devotional.*  
Hanna Reichel. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.  
pp. 87-89.

## **Holy Week: March 29 – April 4**

### **Holy Thursday**

On Holy Thursday Christendom commemorates the institution of the eucharist by our Lord. It happened on the night he was betrayed. Ever since then Christians have celebrated this meal despite all their divisions, though in sorrow that they cannot all celebrate it together.

Nevertheless, it is a consolation that all who call themselves Christians do celebrate it, even though their interpretation of what happens at it is not everywhere quite the same. The meaning of the sacred meal is immensely wide and diversified. We gather round a table, the altar, confessing by this very fact that we are to be united in love like a family. We know by faith that the Lord has promised to be present in such a congregation and is mysteriously there among those who share the meal. His death is proclaimed until he comes again, the death which brings us forgiveness and life, but which also takes us, who die throughout our life, into its incomprehensible mystery and melancholy.

But the meal that is celebrated is already filled with the blessed joy of eternal life which we hope for and expect. Christ unites us in the church, the community of those who believe and love, which is the body, by giving himself to us in the elements of bread and wine, the perfect signs of his body and blood. In this meal the word God speaks to us, the word of eternal love, becomes radiantly present in our darkness. In this sacrifice Christ, who has given himself for us once and for all, is presented as the church's gift to the eternal God.

Now it is true that, from God's point of view, the liturgical celebration of this sacred meal contains what it signifies and gives what it says. Nevertheless, as far as we are concerned, it receives its ultimate truth and fulfillment only when it is celebrated as that "communion" which takes place in the daily round of our earthly life. Even in the eucharist Christ becomes our salvation rather than our judgment only if we also recognize him in the least of our brothers and sisters whom we meet in ordinary life.

We announce the death of the Lord in the mass to our salvation only if in serene faith and hope we also encounter it in its everyday form of sorrow and disappointment. This is how we must live if eucharist is to be our salvation and not our judgment. But this awesome truth contains also a blessed mystery: many may perhaps meet the Lord in their daily life by faithfully obeying the transforming voice of their conscience even though they have not yet found the holy table of the church where he celebrates his sacred meal with us.

*The Great Church Year. Karl Rahner. The Crosswood Publishing Company. 1994. Pp. 144-145.*