

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:10

*For we are what He has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

Raise your hand if you dread the Lenten season like I always have. Give up favorite things or add good deeds. Examine your deep self and root out all the bad habits and sinful behaviors you can find. On February 16, I took Rev. Dr. Russell Levenson's Lenten Devotional, Provoking Thoughts (Amazon), off the shelf to get started. I love his book because it's more encouraging than most. I was still dreading the awfulness of Ash Wednesday and the 40 days ahead, entering the discomfoting Season with that black cross of ashes on my forehead. Haven't we had enough darkness and denial during the past 11 pandemic months?

As I write, we are 19 days in with 21 to go, and what a seismic Season it has already been. It began with the rising sun on Wednesday, February 17.



It was breathtaking. A magnificent backdrop for our coffee and devotionals we do in bed every morning. One devotional read, “Every time the sun rises a new hope begins.” Within an hour or two a dear friend, former rector, called to check in on us because he “hadn’t been in touch for too long.” A sign, I thought, this should be my Lenten “discipline” – to call folks I hadn’t talked to in ages because I had

appreciated that 30-minute encouraging catch-up so much. It would be a discipline, I told myself, because I deem spending time on the phone an interruption of something much more important or a waste of time. Within minutes of hanging up, I received a text from our daughter saying, “Urgent! Call Me.” She bore the shocking news that her children's phenomenal nanny, age 95, had died suddenly. She went from robust health yesterday to resurrection and glory this morning. All hyperbole aside, Pauline was the kindest, most appreciative, most joy-filled, most effective Christian witness I have ever known. For 32 years Pauline's opinion, hope, company, comfort, and joy had been our refuge and strength. She was Jesus with skin on. This unwelcome news brought the sickening realization that, when Pauline had called 2 nights earlier at 9:30, I hadn't answered because it had been a long day and I didn't have the energy to chat for a few minutes. I had intentionally eschewed a chance to hear her kind words of hope and gratitude and return them with mine. “How could I have?” I thought. This was a clear and loud word from God. I need not dig deep. I need not spend the rest of Lent delving inward. I will never again miss an opportunity to offer welcome and warmth. Never ever! I will be vigilant for every opportunity to proffer hope, warmth, comfort, and kindness.

The first 19 days of Lent have been delicious. Making calls, sending encouraging texts, emails, and cards – even “chatting up” for over five minutes with Marcus when he called. Early this morning, less than 16 hours after Marcus' invitation to write a devotional, God gave me the time and place to put my Lenten, now lifetime, resolve to the test. Seated in the airport departure lounge I heard an agitated black man with a non-American accent arguing with the gate agent. He did not have the money to check his bag. He could fly with all the paraphernalia, well over the allotted amount, he was carrying on a previous flight. His situation was hopeless: the gate agent was calling security and the door was closing. I stepped up with my credit card and paid for his bag check. He spoke no thanks and quarreled again with the frustrated gate agent. I said, “Sir, I have just done you a kindness. I want you to be kind to this young lady who is required to do her job properly.” And then I had time to send a few more encouraging texts and emails before my flight was called. I felt Pauline's approving arm around my shoulders. I heard Jesus' approving whisper. I realized the purpose of Lent.

*Prayer:* Holy God, with each new sunrise, quicken my resolve to be new hope in the world.

~ Submitted by Katherine Jeter for the Thirty-fourth reading of Lent.