



*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
— Isaiah 60*

Seasonal Affective Disorder happens when a lack of sunlight affects our moods and ability to cope effectively. **Spiritual Affective Disorder** can also be a condition when we've had prolonged stress and life is disturbingly uncertain. What is our faithful response to our strained mental health? What if everyday life activities could become spiritual practices — deepening our experience of a meaningful life and helping us shine a light on the “blahs?”

[This is designed as an 8-week series. It can stand alone any time of year as a non-lectionary series even though it was originally designed for Epiphany “Plus” RCL Year A (with a focus on readings from the Hebrew Bible). In 2023 Epiphany Plus is only 7 weeks. Delete one week in this series (if you want to stay true to the RCL for 2023, delete week 7)]

More info at www.worshipdesignstudio.com/SAD

Week One — Flip the Switch

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. . . . Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice...” — Isaiah 60: 1-6

Millions of people suffer from some sort of anxiety or depression disorder. If you do not, chances are you are close to someone who does. As we begin our series on Spiritual Affective Disorder, we begin to look at spiritual practices to get us out of the mid-winter blues and into the light of our lives. While not a replacement for medical resources to alleviate depression, we will see how experiencing the everyday activities of our lives as blessing—as filled with God’s radiance—can offer us a chance to be filled with the Light in whom we believe. This first week we affirm that the very act of “arising” each day is a gift from God.

Week Two — To Soothe the Soul

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord. — Psalm 40: 1-11

Maria von Trapp, the real Maria of “The Sound of Music,” said, “Music acts like a magic key, to which the most tightly closed heart opens.” Indeed, music is known to have a powerful effect on our moods with its ability to literally “move” us. The Psalmist proclaims that God can give us a new song, bringing us out of a “miry bog.” Today we affirm that attention to our music “playlists” can offer a transformative daily spiritual practice.

Week Three — Lighten Up

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined. . . . — Isaiah 9: 1-4

Life can be serious business. Certainly watching the daily news can give the impression that there is little good to find in the world. This week we choose to lighten up—to “spin” life in a little different way as we look for the delight and especially, humor, in life. A lot of people cite the ability to make us laugh as a number one thing they look for in friends and spouses. Many comedians have the knack for seeing everyday life in ways that make us laugh. Perhaps laughter is the best medicine.

Week Four — Make My Day

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? — Micah 6: 1-8

The prophet Micah offered up a vision for life lived from a different perspective. Rather than see doing good as “obligatory sacrifice,” he said that when we live our lives with a love for kindness for all God’s people, we are fulfilling God’s desire to spread justice and love throughout the land. This week, what if we lived each day on the lookout for ways to make someone’s day through a kind and unexpected gesture? It might just make *our* day as well!

Week Five — Little Altars Everywhere

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. — Psalm 84 (from the Presentation of the Lord lection)

Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever. They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous. — Psalm 112: 1-9

Where do you think God’s “dwelling place” is? The Psalmist speaks of longing to be in God’s “house.” Indeed, being in what feels like a sacred place can transform and inspire us. Instead of thinking that finding God requires us to go to

a designated place like our church, what if we created spaces that reminded us of the sacred wherever we are? This week you are invited to create an “altar” in your home that can remind you that God dwells in all places.

Week Six — Walk This Way

If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in God’s ways, and observing God’s commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. — Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways. — Psalm 119: 1-8

Research shows that one of the most effective mood-boosters is moving our bodies. Stretching, walking, and dancing can send feel-good endorphins coursing through us and the change can feel like a light coming on. The Hebrew authors of our scriptures used the metaphor of “walking” in God’s ways to help us see the benefits to our spiritual lives of moving toward the goodness of God. This week our spiritual practice will help us see our walking (or any kind of movement) as a blessed gift of God’s love in action in the world!

Week Seven — Leave Room for Dessert

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God. — Leviticus 19: 1-2, 9-18

The server at your favorite restaurant might regularly say to you, “leave room for dessert!” In other words, don’t eat to excess — leave some room. This is a good spiritual practice, says the author of Leviticus. Gleaning is the practice of gathering food for those who need it out of the abundance of what is available. What awareness can we bring to the food we buy, cook and throw away as part of our spiritual mandate to care for the human family? Whether it is cooking more than enough and sharing with someone who needs it, buying extra at the grocery store to donate to the food bank, or getting involved in a gleaning network’s efforts, our everyday use of foods is our spiritual practice this week.

Week Eight — Get Up and Don't Be Afraid

While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." — Matthew 17: 1-9

The last Sunday of this series is a time when we remember a mystical moment some of the disciples had with Jesus when he was joined by spiritual ancestors Moses and Elijah on the mountain and God's voice affirming Jesus' work as pleasing. For weeks we have considered the everyday activities of our lives as a way to be nurtured spiritually. Finally, we see the opportunities to encourage each other in the efforts of each day of our lives — "get up and don't be afraid!"