

*Walking Through Lent in Community  
in 2017*



*Christ Episcopal Church  
Rockville, MD*

## *Introduction*



Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome to Christ Church's 7th annual booklet of devotions for the days of Lent. I'm very grateful to the Adult Christian Formation Committee, chaired by Fran Palmer, for continuing this project with energy and great devotion; and to all of you who have chosen to grace these pages with your reflections, inspired by the daily office readings.

In many ways there can be no more important work for the church of today than in investing in projects such as this. We Episcopalians often safely reside in the shadow of the liturgies that shape our worship, and we accordingly don't focus enough on how we might share our faith in a world that is hungry for the meaning and presence of God. In choosing to write these reflections, we humbly acknowledge that we hope to be vessels for the grace and peace of Christ, one to another, by our thoughts and words. Such work builds up the life of this community, and makes us all the richer and stronger in faith.

May these days of Lent be deeply rewarding and enlightening to us all.

Faithfully,

The Rev. John S. McDuffie  
Rector, Christ Church

## *Preface*

Welcome to the **7th Lenten Devotional booklet** produced by Christ Church Rockville. Inside you will find meditations written by members of our faith community on the personal meaning of Lent or on lectionary-appointed scripture readings for that day of Lent. These daily meditations are for you to read, ponder, and treasure as a shared journey through Lent. All the devotions are a labor of love: love for our faith, love for the mystery of Lent, love for our parish.

It is not easy to sit down and express one's personal perspective on the scripture readings for Lent, thereby expressing our depth of faith. This expression takes commitment, focus, organization, zeal, and courage. These expressions of faith can be pivotal to shoring up a faith community and for spreading the miracle of the risen Christ.

Thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make this 7th Lenten Devotional booklet a reality in such a short time frame. A special thanks to **Cindy Griffiths** for managing the project and helping to prepare the booklet for publishing; the **Rev. Cindy Simpson** for her diligent assistance and encouragement; **Jack Gregory** for the sign-up sheets and the choice of the cover art; **Mark Wright** for aiding us in organizing timelines, supplying archival materials, and facilitating this transition as he moves on to other ministries; and the entire **Lenten Devotional Committee** for reviewing the draft and making this such an enjoyable team effort. Much gratitude is also given, of course, to the **Rev. John McDuffie** for his introduction to this booklet and for his steadfast support of this project.

Fran Palmer-Hill  
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# *Ash Wednesday and Days Following*

Ash Wednesday ~ March 1, 2017

Jonah 3:1-4:11

Heb. 12:1-14

Luke 18:9-14

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*Jonah 3:10-4:1 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry*

In this reading the word of God has come to Jonah a second time to tell him to go to the city of Nineveh and cry out against its wickedness. As we all remember the story of Jonah, the first time the word of God came to Jonah he ran away from the presence of the Lord, boarded a ship, was thrown overboard and was swallowed by a whale. God saved Jonah in response to Jonah's pleas for forgiveness and salvation.

Jonah finally goes to Nineveh and proclaimed that in forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown. The people believed Jonah as a prophet of God, turned from their wickedness and God spared the city.

Even though Jonah was a successful prophet and missionary he remained very angry and wanted to die. He never wanted to go to Nineveh. He was disobedient, rebellious, willful, and ungrateful. He wanted to live his life his own way and not be the agent of his benevolent God. He could not escape his appointed task but he still resented and deplored every step.

So often I see myself in Jonah. I want my days and my life to go the way I want them to go. I have preconceived ideas of the perfect event, the perfect day, the perfect season, the perfect vacation. Life rarely approaches perfection and I am often disappointed, resentful, or sorrowful. We have many common adages for our 'Jonah' times. 'Don't view the glass as half empty.' 'Don't throw the baby out with the bath water.' 'Don't cut off your nose to spite your face.'

During this Lenten season I wish to recognize, embrace and harvest the hidden gifts and bounty which abound in my life that are ever given by God.

—Fran Palmer-Hill

Thursday ~ March 2, 2017

Deut. 7:6-11

Titus 1:1-16

John 1:29-34

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When I was a little boy, I was taught and encouraged to give up something for Lent. Forty days without something I liked or loved: soft drinks; or candy; or ice cream. It was an effort to follow Christ's lead of fasting for forty days and forty nights. As a young adult, soft drinks, candy or ice cream choices were too easy. So smoking or alcoholic beverages were better challenges. But as a baby boomer in a Western educated industrialized rich democracy (WEIRD as Jonathon Haidt, author of *The Righteous Mind* calls it), none of these choices came close to the sacrifice of forsaking food for five and a half weeks.

In reference to Titus 1-16, the qualifications for bishops and elders were more stringent behavior modifications: "*..not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just holding fast the faithful word he hath taught that he may be able by sound doctrine both exhort and to convince the gain sayers.*"

Doesn't suppression of anger impulses for a bishop's candidacy - which is probably expected to be maintained year-round if selected - constitute a larger sacrifice than forty days' denial of creature comforts?

Such tests of will power may keep you, the non-bishop candidate, humble and endear you to other people. It may qualify you to be among "*the meek who will inherit the earth*". Perhaps. But only through such mind-over-matter willpower can the human come close to that result.

—John Allnutt



Friday ~ March 3, 2017

Deut. 7:12-16  
Titus 2:1-15  
John 1:35-42

~~~~~  
I am a reprobate. Paul would certainly have written to me, or written to my congregation about me.

I abuse alcohol. I covet my neighbor's wife. Titus Ch. 2 (my assignment) talks to me. I strive to adhere to all the strictures Paul recommends for Titus's flock. I am bade to be "temperate, serious, sensible, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness." A tall order. And one worthy of entertaining during Lent. *Temperate*: three or fewer glasses of wine per night. *Serious*: cognizant of the surrounding political furor and aware of how to act around adults. *Sensible*: "sober" in my choices. "*Sound in faith*": following the letter and spirit of the Book, helping others, showing kindness. "*Sound in love*": standing by my loved ones. "*Sound in steadfastness*": being constant in my devotion. Since practice makes perfect, if I practice these exhortations during Lent, maybe they'll stick for the rest of the year.

—Anonymous



Saturday ~ March 4, 2017

Deut. 7:17-26

Titus 3:1-15

John 1:43-5

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**Deut. 7:17-26 Titus 3:1-15 John 1:43-51**

In these divisive and uncertain times, when many of us are feeling deep anxiety about the future, these passages remind us that our fate is not our own and that we should trust in the Lord. Just as He led the Israelites out of Egypt and then delivered them from the enemies that surrounded them, He will lead us through uncertain times if we trust in Him.

I hope to use the period of Lent as an opportunity to turn away from the “foolish controversies ... and arguments and quarrels about the law” that constantly swirl around us these days and to reflect on how I can strengthen my own faith. In Titus we are reminded that the cure for living “in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another” is simply the mercy and love of our Savior. What a world we would live in if we could just follow the simple edict that follows: “To be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.”

— Jeffrey Evans



# The First Week of Lent

Monday ~ March 6, 2017

Deut. 8:11-20

Heb. 2:11-18

John 2:1-12

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## Gospel of John 2:1-12

Jesus and his mother, Mary, are invited to a wedding in Cana of Galilee near Nazareth where Jesus grew up.

At the wedding feast there was a lack of wine. Jesus' mother, Mary, said to Jesus, "They have no wine." Jesus answered: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? My hour is not yet come." This, Jesus' reply, sounds like a rebuke. However, He could be thinking, with sorrow, that in the future many would believe in Him and His teaching of Gods' love and mercy, but many would reject Him.

Now Mary told the servants of the wedding feast to obey Jesus' words to the: "Fill the water pots with water... Draw some out now and bear it to the governor of the feast." The governor of the feast declared that the best wine is now being served! Everyone was pleased. Jesus had turned the water into wine! He wanted everyone at the wedding to be happy!

— Richard Cole



Tuesday ~ March 7, 2017

Deut. 9:4-12

Heb. 3:1-11

John 2:13-22

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**John 2:13-22**

I came to this enterprise hoping to dash off something and go. Little did I expect to be upended.

John's account of Jesus cleansing the temple follows his transforming water into delectable wine at the wedding in Cana: a dawning of the "final age" appears in the Gospel writer's own lifetime with an invitation to us to discover the same. Commentator Gerard Sloyan, referring to the Gospel author as the believer asks:

"Has the life of the believer...filled any but the greatest 'enthusiast' with the conviction that this age is a time of fiery red wine and not pallid water?... John's genius is that of the totally committed believer.... Angels ascending and descending, the Messiah discovered, six jars of twenty-five gallons each of the finest vintage turned loose on an already incandescent peasantry. This is the poetry of absolute newness. Only those who live in newness know what to make of it...." (*Interpretation: John*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988, pp.38-39.)

This cosmos-altering reality shocked me with the query—to what extent do I embrace newness? Tasting ho-hum water on my lips I know not enough.

Jesus enters Jerusalem and rids his "Father's house" of its marketplace. When challenged by Jewish authorities as to his right to act thusly, he replies, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John adds that the temple would soon reside not in the building of elegant stone but rather in the body of Jesus himself. The central dwelling place of God moves into Christ crucified and risen.

"To believe is to know that the old order has passed away and the new has come." (Sloyan)

I leave the wedding and temple resolved to open myself to more daybreaks of life, with gratitude for such holy ground. Blessings be upon you as you seek this new age in whatever way you and the Spirit find is yours. Amen.

— The Rev. Cynthia Simpson

Wednesday ~ March 8, 2017

Deut. 9:13-21

Heb. 3:12-19

John 2:23–3:15

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*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

*-John 3:5-8*

The word ‘Lent’ originates from the old English, ‘lencten,’ which means ‘spring.’ It is related to the Old German word ‘lenzin’ meaning ‘to lengthen.’ As the daylight hours increase, sap begins to rise within the trees, and flowers push upwards from deep within the earth, the season of Lent offers us a chance for spiritual transformation – to take a hard look at ourselves and to align our hearts with our most fundamental values. Observers most often give something up – whether it be chocolate, wine, time on our smartphones, or busyness – to better relate to the long suffering of Jesus and the Israelites. But we can just as easily try something new, such as adding quiet time to our day, and keep to the meaning of Lent. As Jesus said, we have to “be born again of water and the Spirit” to enter the kingdom of God. These are the only conditions Jesus sets to be born again.

During the season of Lent, may we have the courage to try something new and allow this “leap of faith” to awaken our hearts to the miracles of Jesus that are all around us.

—Khalisa Phillips

Thursday ~ March 9, 2017

Deut. 9:23—10:5

Heb. 4:1-10

John 3:16-21

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### **The Meaning of Lent**

I am a believer of a simple faith in Jesus Christ and all he has done for me.

Lent is a time I work on myself trying to be follower of Christ in my journey.

I pray a meditate on the grace of God who sent Jesus to save me many years ago.

Every year during Lent I reflect on how far I have grown in my Christian life and how short I have failed. Then I thank God for forgiving me and ask him to strengthen me to overcome my short coming.

A few year ago I visited a church. On that day the choir sung a hymnal that had a deep meaning to my faith with these words: Jesus purchased my salvation way back on Calvary tree. He conquered sins and death and grave just because He loved me.

Since that day Lent has new meaning. I understand that Jesus had done what I could not do and I am grateful for that.

John 3:16-17, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him”

—Joy Murorunkwere

Friday ~ March 10, 2017

Deut. 10:12-22

Heb. 4:11-16

John 3:22-36

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### Hebrews 4:11-16

*“Let us then with confidence draw near the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

Some years ago, twelve or so parishioners at Christ Church formed a Contemplative Prayer group that met every Wednesday to discuss this ancient Christian tradition and practice it as a group for thirty minutes. *Open Mind Open Heart, the Contemplative Dimension to the Gospel* by Father Thomas Keating served as our guidebook. It was a very meaningful experience for me and I think for many of the other participants.

The practice we followed was to read a sacred passage and meditate on it quietly being open and attentive to how God might manifest his presence in our lives. I will not forget the evening one of our members shared with us that she just couldn't do centering prayer. She said despairingly, "I just can't seem to do this. I start out repeating my sacred word . . . but after a little while I lose the word and find myself looking at a vision of myself resting at the feet of Jesus." Although she found the practice very comforting and peaceful, she was truly discouraged it wasn't going like she imagined it should. Not long after that, she passed away. Since that time, I have found myself pulled back to that evening. I believe that God was preparing Taffy for what was just around the corner in her life and spiritual journey. That in the silence of centering prayer, God was pouring out his mercy and grace in ways unknowable to us at the time. For me, it affirmed the Prayer of Quiet Confidence with which we started our sessions.

*O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

—Jack Gregory

Saturday ~ March 11, 2017

Deut. 11:18-28

Heb. 5:1-10

John 4:1-26

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**John 4:1-26**

This reading shows how we all will see God, even if we are outcasts, or people that are not accepted because of their fortune, like the Samaritan woman, who had five marriages. God accepts everyone, even her, who was thrown away like trash. God tries to bring us to the land of salvation, and in this reading, God tries, and even more, he succeeds. It shows, that by God's love, we eventually come to him, and to the Promised Land (Heaven). In this reading, Jesus brings outcasts in, and we should be doing that, especially these days.

— Esme Pickel





# The Second Week of Lent

Monday ~ March 13, 2017

Jer. 1:11-19

Rom. 1:1-15

John 4:27-42

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## **John 4: 27-42 The Disciples Rejoin Jesus**

*Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”*

*Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.*

*Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”*

*But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”*

*Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”*

*“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.”*

*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.*

*They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.” (NIV)*

This passage reminds me of when the kids were little. They run around and you try to get them to stop and eat something nutritious. It’s your job. The disciples were doing the same as they tried to get Jesus to eat and take care of himself.

But Jesus wanted them to see beyond the day-to-day needs. He reminds them we must also harvest a crop for eternal life and not just fret about dinner.

As we go from activity to activity, we need to open up the space to do the hard work of keeping the faith and showing the world how to believe.

—Anonymous

Tuesday ~ March 14, 2016

Jer. 2:1-13  
Rom. 1:16-25  
John 4:43-54

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**Jeremiah 2:1-13**

*“Be appalled, O Heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”*

The strong language of this passage certainly caught my attention, as it was no doubt intended to do! “What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?...I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination.”

In this passage, we are admonished in the strongest of terms, for taking for granted God’s assistance and gifts, and for forgetting him after partaking of His gifts.

Having heeded these words, as we go through Lent together, let us remember God’s gifts to us, let us return to a simplicity of devotion, remembering the times we followed God into the wilderness, were saved and given great gifts and rewards. With this remembrance, let us practice being thankful at all times, and live in gratitude especially at times when we are not in need and simply enjoying living here in the land of plenty with its fruits and good things.

Let us resolve to live in a state of appreciation and ongoing acknowledgement that where we are today is a result of God’s gifts to us. Let us remember that He is the fountain of living waters, and we are not to “change our glory for that which does not profit.”

Let us protect the land and heritage given us and go through Lent actively remembering, appreciating, being grateful for and protecting all that God has given us.

—Delia McCormick

Wednesday ~ March 15, 2017

Jer. 3:6-18  
Rom. 1:28—2:11  
John 5:1-18

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One of the readings appointed for today is from Jeremiah 3:6-18. Jeremiah visits the potter's house to watch him work and, "The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him."

I saved a passage from an article written by Carolyn Hax, an advice columnist for *The Washington Post*, on 22 October 2014 that particularly resonated with me, "When people have been shattered, there's no future, unshattered version of them waiting to emerge. There is only the possibility of their being formed into something new, whole, even beautiful, of the pieces."

When life chips, cracks, or even smashes to bits the vessel of our lives, the Divine Potter wants to remake us into something new and beautiful if we give Him the chance, even if it might not look like what we expect. After all, the shattered pieces might not be capable of being re-formed into a vessel, but they might be able to create a stunning mosaic.

This Lent, let us give the Divine Potter the opportunity to create new art in us.

—Allison Roulier

Thursday ~ March 16, 2017

Jer. 4:9-10, 19-28

Rom. 2:12-24

John 5:19-29

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### **A Child of Mine\***

I will lend you, for a little time,  
A child of mine, He said.  
For you to love the while she lives,  
And mourn for when she's dead.  
It may be six or seven years,  
Or twenty-two or three.  
But will you, till I call her back,  
Take care of her for Me?  
She'll bring her charms to gladden you,  
And should her stay be brief.  
You'll have her lovely memories,  
As solace for your grief.  
I cannot promise she will stay,  
Since all from earth return.  
But there are lessons taught down there,  
I want this child to learn.  
I've looked the wide world over,  
In search for teachers true.  
And from the throngs that crowd life's lanes,  
I have selected you.  
Now will you give her all your love,  
Nor think the labour vain.  
Nor hate me when I come  
To take her home again?  
I fancied that I heard them say,  
'Dear Lord, Thy will be done!'  
For all the joys Thy child shall bring,  
The risk of grief we'll run.  
We'll shelter her with tenderness,  
We'll love her while we may,  
And for the happiness we've known,  
Forever grateful stay.  
But should the angels call for her,  
Much sooner than we've planned.  
We'll brave the bitter grief that comes,  
And try to understand.

\*Anonymous, first published in a newspaper ©1930

—Bryan & Gaye Maust

Friday ~March 17, 2017

Jer. 5:1-9  
Rom. 2:25—3:18  
John 5:30-47



**John 5:30-47**

*“If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true.*

*“You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.*

*“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

*“I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*

*“But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” (NIV)*

Do we put accepting glory from one another above seeking the glory that comes from the only God?

Are we able to put aside approval from others to go out on a limb for God?

Do we have the love of God in our hearts?

—Anonymous

Saturday ~ March 18, 2017

Jer. 5:20-31  
Rom. 3:19-31  
John 7:1-13

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*The Psalm appointed for today's reading is 103:1-4, 9-12*

*1 Bless the Lord, O my soul, \* and all that is within me, bless his holy Name.*

*2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, \* and forget not all his benefits.*

*3 He forgives all your sins \* and heals all your infirmities;*

*4 He redeems your life from the grave \* and crowns you with mercy and loving-kindness;*

*9 He will not always accuse us, \* nor will he keep his anger forever.*

*10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, \* nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.*

*11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, \* so is his mercy great upon those who fear him.*

*12 As far as the east is from the west, \* so far has he removed our sins from us.*

To me Lent is a time for reflection: a time to reassess my beliefs, my values, and my sense of purpose. It is a time to sift through and decide if I am on the right track and if not what I have to do to readjust. I find the best way to do this is to ask myself the question: "What is the state of my soul?" To me my soul is my inner most self, the core of my being. My soul is beyond consciousness but I can feel it. I contact it with wordless prayer by quietly asking how it is doing—what is its state? In the silence of prayer my soul emerges and lets me know and so the reflections, the sifting begins.

Take time today to be silent and listen to what your soul has to say to you.

— Karen Near



# *The Third Week of Lent*

Monday ~ March 20, 2017

Jer. 7:1-15

Rom. 4:1-12

John 7:14-36



## **John 7:34**

*“You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.”*

We search and search for the next best thing that will give us a boost and feel a little better. Click that gold button on the screen and send yourself a little something. A little contentment for a while, but then the feeling fades.

Sometimes we search for peace and contentment in all the wrong places. I know I do. I think this Lenten season I will search for love in smiles of children. I will search for contentment in hugs. And I will look for Jesus in this wonderful church that has taken me in.

I bet you I will find him here.

—Stuart Davis

Tuesday ~ March 21, 2017

Jer. 7:21-34  
Rom. 4:13-25  
John 7:37-52

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**John 7:37-52**

*On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

*On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” Others said, “He is the Messiah.”*

*Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.*

*Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him in?”*

*“No one ever spoke the way this man does,” the guards replied.*

*“You mean he has deceived you also?” the Pharisees retorted. “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them.”*

*Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, “Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?”*

*They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.” (NIV)*

Since we weren’t alive in Jesus’ time, we can only imagine what it would be like to hear him speak. As we read through the scripture, we gather clues as to how we would react to his teachings.

In today’s passage we learn that the guards who were sent to seize Jesus heard him speaking and would not lay a hand on him. They recognized his truth. They knew full well they would have to face the Pharisees and they disobeyed.

Imagine how powerful his words must have been in the middle of the greatest day of the festival when people were packed in the streets.

We find our faith through their faith.

—Anonymous

Wednesday ~ March 22, 2017

Jer. 8:18—9:6

Rom. 5:1-11

John 8:12-20

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Today's readings record criticism, charges, and general civil discord of the past. "Let every one beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother." (Jer 9:4) "The Pharisees then said to him, 'You are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true.'" (John 8:13)

It can be depressing to read.

My immediate reaction is to reinterpret these arguments in a modern-day context and to assign roles to individuals in current society. But I think this is the wrong approach for me, particularly during Lent. This is an outward projection of uncharitable characteristics on others. In Lent, I feel that I should strive to reflect inward. Which of these uncharitable characteristics do I display? Where can I improve?

Of course, the goal of that inward reflection is also found in the passages. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) Paul wrote, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1) I think it is that internal light and peace that I must seek to rebuff my angst over external disagreement and disharmony. Finding that peace often proves difficult, but Lent offers me a time to try; for that I am grateful.

—Charlie Griffiths

Thursday ~ March 23, 2017

Jer. 10:11-24  
Rom. 5:12-21  
John 8:21-32

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**Jeremiah 10:11-24**

What does Jeremiah say to me today?

Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry began in 626 B.C. At the beginning of his journey, he reveals (1:6-10) that he lacks the confidence to be a prophet, much like Moses. The Lord emboldens him to not be afraid, because He will be with him and sustain him with His continuing presence. When Jeremiah began his ministry, it was a time of great stress among the nations. He inspired attention to truth in his own time and in ours. Who among us today does not feel great stress among the nations of the world?

When I read the Old Testament, I am struck by how God reaches out to us in whatever culture we happen to be born into at whatever time in history. Jeremiah warns us not to be deceived by false gods. Just as in Jeremiah’s day, many of us are misled by the false gods of today. How many of the things that I turn to for wisdom and guidance offer timeless truths? Jesus leads us to “Love the Lord God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39)

We are living in a time when many of us are concerned about justice in the world around us. A well-known quote, that is full of hope, from Martin Luther King, Jr. states, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Questions we may want to reflect on are: “How is the arc bent?” and “Does it bend by itself?.” I believe that turning again and again to God’s love, grace, and wisdom and then serving Him with a humble heart helps bend the arc toward justice.

— Ruth Billinger

Friday ~ March 24, 2017

Jer. 11:1-8, 14-20

Rom. 6:1-11

John 8:33-47

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***Jeremiah 11:1-8***

God is commanding Jeremiah to speak to the people of Judah that if they don't repent, judgement is coming to them and God will curse the people if they don't obey His word, and bless those who do obey.

*Jeremiah 11:14-20*

God wants Jeremiah not to pray for the Israelites as they are idol worshippers. Israel was compared to an olive tree and all its fruitful beauty but they the people are sinners and were not good.

God is asking us, begging us even to sin no more, to do only good on this earth so that we may be blessed to be with him in Heaven one day. A pretty big request from God to us. One that we can strive for by simply "doing unto others as you would have them do unto you." Something to think about as I open my eyes and wonder what the day brings. Perhaps I can make a difference in others' lives today.

*Romans 6:1-11*

St. Paul is telling the Romans that God will sanctify the believers and those who live a holy life— never reaching perfection, but striving for it. At conversion we died to sin, spiritually baptized into Christ given God's grace, buried with Him in death, and then rising to new life in Heaven.

St. Paul would like us to strive to be more Christ-like. Learning everyday how to have more patience and practice more kindness to each one we meet.

*John 8:33-47*

The Jews believed that because they were descendants of Abraham they were entitled to have an inner sense of freedom to do what they desired. Jesus was teaching them about being slaves to sin. They just weren't acting like they were sons of God by doing what they wanted to and not living by the rules laid down by God through Abraham.

All of these teachings are lessons for us to think that God is with us every day all day. Keeping us on the path to being with Him one day, but taking the journey away from sin and living in the grace he gave us (through Baptism) to love our neighbor as ourselves.

—Marylouise Roach

Saturday ~ March 25, 2017

Jer. 13:1-11  
Rom. 6:12-23  
John 8:47-59

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Why do we plunge ourselves into the solemnity of Lent just as the dark winter days have begun to lighten up? At a time when days are growing longer and one anticipates early spring crocuses and daffodils, why choose the seriousness of the Lenten season? Why, as we creep toward the vernal equinox, a time of brighter days, would we subject ourselves to penitence, prayer, and fasting? And how can Lent prevail in modern times?

Our church altar cloths turn deep purple and black. We “give up” sweets or TV or swearing... things that bring joy at other moments. Or perhaps we begin a program of scripture readings and reflections.

On a recent Sunday, Cindy Simpson led the congregation in reading “*A Prayer attributed to St. Francis*” from the Book of Common Prayer.\* Its familiar cadences with concepts artfully juxtaposed (darkness and light, sadness and joy, death and eternal life) describe the Lent and Easter relationship. In fact, this prayer reinforces the purpose for experiencing the gravity of Lent.

For centuries these prayer lines have proven inspirational for individuals and groups who yearn for solutions and peace. Even today, as individuals and societies experience simple or complex challenges, we people of God maintain the solemn tradition of Lent to better recognize and appreciate peace and joy...

*Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*

\* <http://www.bcponline.org/Misc/Prayers.html>

—Donna Gentry



# *The Fourth Week of Lent*

Monday ~ March 27, 2017

Jer. 16:10-21

Rom. 7:1-12

John 6:1-15

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**Isaiah 65:17-25**

**John 4:43-54**

The way the world is, is not be the way the world will always be. God challenges us to imagine beyond the present. When life is settled for some; when certain groups or communities believe that God has given them everything, and so it will always be regardless of how or whether they love and care for each other—then disaster cannot be too far in the future. We banish our peacemakers; we kill our dreamers; we marginalize our visionaries. Still, this is not the last word.

When a society is fractured; when war rages; when there is violence and derision; racism and bigotry—when the weak; the fragile; the vulnerable, the marginalized—those who depend on us who are lost and forgotten, those who disappear in smoke and dust—Yet, this is not the last word. When I see a child starving for want of bread and parched for a sip of water; when I look into the eyes of the most vulnerable of our world and realize that their very eyes pierce our souls; when I see an infant die long before he/she should die, this vision of the prophet takes hold assuredly. This is not the last word.

There will come a time when all of creation will come together—all of God's people, here, there, everywhere will come together. Newness almost always is borne out of contexts where there is, or has been pain, suffering, tragedy, grief, wilderness, exile. How we care, systemically and individually is the measure of a society, of the world. Lent is a striking reminder that the darkness is not the last word and finally there is newness in the resurrection.

—The Rev. Hemchand Gossai, Ph.D.

Tuesday ~ March 28, 2017

Jer. 17:19-27  
Rom. 7:13-25  
John 6:16-27

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John 6:16-27 is a passage of the new testament familiar to many of us. Right after the miracle of feeding the multitude with five barley loaves and two small fishes (I wonder how they counted the great multitude), the disciples cast off in their ship without Jesus. It must have been a rushed exit because there were high winds (like when our fronts come through). They were startled after they were away from the shore to see Jesus walking on the water to join them. They were frightened and amazed.

How is this relevant today—what does our sea look like? There was no plastic floating, no rapidly rising water level, no oceans so foul, you would hesitate to walk in them. The birds are still feeding from the sea but choking on plastic, we lose homes built near the oceans in fierce storms, and we are going deeper and deeper in the ocean to discover what wonders are still hidden from us.

Lent offers a time for me to reflect on our world—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. To treasure what I have, to mourn what we have lost and to look ahead for how it can be a disciple that while fearful at times, can still be amazed and believe in tomorrow with God's grace.

—Ruth Hanessian

Wednesday ~ March 29, 2017

Jer. 18:1-11  
Rom. 8:1-11  
John 6:27-40

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For several years I have written devotions for this booklet. Each year the passages have gotten tougher to relate to. This year, however, I was given a day of readings each of which spoke to me. The reading from Jeremiah reminded of my childhood church experiences listening to the altar call,

*Have thine own way Lord, Have thine own way,  
Thou are the potter, I am the clay,  
mold me and make me after thy will,  
while I am waiting, yielded and still.*

Paul's writing from Romans made me think of teenage years when I tortured myself with a distorted belief that I was obsessed with the flesh and how, over the years, this passage has transformed to a focus on Spirit and love. Then with Jesus' words from John, I reflected upon my struggles and how my current physical recovery from obesity began with a little group we called the Spiritual Food Group here at Christ Church that used this passage as our inspiration to invite God into our relationships with food. With such a luxury of choices, I felt I had no choice but to simply reflect on each and hope that each reader will find as much joy and comfort in today's readings as I.

*Have thine own way, Lord!  
Have thine own way!  
Hold o'er my being absolute sway.  
Fill with thy Spirit till all shall see  
Christ only, always, living in me!*

Adelaide A. Pollard 1862-1934

—John Arnold

Thursday ~ March 30, 2017

Jer. 22:13-23  
Rom. 8:12-27  
John 6:41-51

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Today's readings touch on justice, difficult questions, and help in prayer. Each of them speaks to me, and I trust they will to you. I was especially struck by the passage from Romans, in particular:

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” Romans 8, 26-27*

What a wonderful and powerful image—the Spirit interceding for us “with sighs too deep for words.” Does this mean that prayer transcends words? How ought we to pray? If “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” how do we learn to do so? How do we open our hearts to the Spirit and encourage the Spirit’s intercession with our prayers? How does the Lenten practice of giving up something help us “to pray as we ought?” How can we use this Lenten season to deepen our understanding of prayer?

—Sandra Clark

Friday ~ March 31, 2017

Jer. 23:1-8  
Rom. 8:28-39  
John 6:52-59

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**John 6:52-59**

*Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*

*Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."*

*He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. (NIV)*

Saturday ~ April 1, 2017

Jer. 23:9-15  
Rom. 9:1-18  
John 6:60-71

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**John 6:63-66**

*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. “Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.” From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*

How easy it could be during times of trouble to just give up, lay down our heavy hearts, and turn our backs on finding the way forward—to unburden our flesh from the demands of everyday life and to stop serving others who are in much more need than we are. But the flesh counts for nothing, as the scripture says. It is the Spirit that gives life.

Sometimes when I’m faced with hardships, I’m as guilty as the disciples described above who did not believe in Jesus. I ask myself, “How can such poverty, anguish, discrimination, illness, and violence be bestowed on people in this world who so readily do not deserve it?” Sometimes it’s hard to believe that what’s happening right in front of me is actually real. In those times, when I’m overwhelmed by the events swirling around me, both big and small, I have to trust in the Spirit, the Spirit that gives life, that I will find my way back. And I do.

—Anonymous

# *The Fifth Week of Lent*

Monday ~ April 3, 2017

Jer. 24:1-10  
Rom. 9:19-33  
John 9:1-17



*“Jesus answered, ‘neither this man nor his parents sinned, he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.’ – John 9:3*

Sometimes bad things just happen whether it is on the scale of a flat tire, job loss, or long-term illness. It is not planned against us. It is no one punishing us. And, it is not payback for anything we did. Bad things just happen for no apparent reason. Jesus reminds us here that each time a bad thing happens, it is an opportunity for God the Father to manifest Himself; in the situation, the solution, and in our acknowledgement of His presence and work throughout. Keeping our focus on Him allows Him to shine through the bad. Lent is a journey through bad things happening to get to the joy and celebration of Easter morning.

— Jodi Van Horne

Tuesday ~April 4, 2017

Jer. 25:8-17  
Rom. 10:1-13  
John 9:18-41

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In a recent episode of his online series, *Comedians In Cars Getting Coffee*, Jerry Seinfeld compared himself to a woodchuck. Woodchucks, he said, have to chuck as much wood as possible during their lives. Chucking wood is what woodchucks do. Similarly, he feels compelled to produce as much comedy as possible during his life.

Like Seinfeld and woodchucks, the Pharisees apparently felt driven, too. In John 9:18-41, they grilled a once-blind young man about his healing at the hands of Jesus. They wanted to pass judgment on the fellow, and anyone else they could get their hands on who claimed Jesus is the Messiah.

A few of the Pharisees in this encounter actually tried to be funny: “What? Are we blind too?” (Ba dump bump, clang.) But Jesus shot them down: “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.” Ouch.

I can’t poke too much fun at the Pharisees. Like them, I’m a hypocrite: I sin as I breathe—envy, lust, anger, pride, sloth, whatever. It never stops. Sometimes I can say I’m sorry during confession, and mean it, but experience says I’ll quickly revert to well-worn patterns.

Jesus is no fool. He knows that I fear being converted like a woodchuck fears being trapped. He knows I can’t seem to imagine why or how he could possibly love us so much as to suffer and die for us, then forgive his tormenters—and forgive us.

Such love is beyond me. Lent is a time when that gap between God’s love and my daily desire to scurry away feels widest. It’s a scary space, yet one I cannot escape.

—Mark Wright



Wednesday ~ April 5, 2017

Jer. 25:30-38  
Rom. 10:14-21  
John 10:1-18



### **Starting Over**

It's Spring again – Suddenly  
she's stepping forth  
from the dark heart of Winter –  
There's no stopping Her,  
nor, indeed, who would want to –  
So soft and delicate,  
She woos my weary soul to  
hopeful prayers –

Let me linger near the lush new  
leaves of Irish green,  
bountiful and rain-filled –

Who knows if I'll see a future spring?  
Only God holds the paintbrush  
for every coming season –

Fresh canvas –  
For life's coming years –

### **Comfort Me**

Consoling me, a light  
summer breeze –  
The breeze does not know why,  
but He does;  
the One who sends  
the light summer breeze,  
consoles me –  
He knows why –

—Josephine Darner

Thursday ~ April 6, 2017

Jer. 26:1-16  
Rom. 11:1-12  
John 10:19-42

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Lately I've been throwing myself into my "works."

At first it happened quite accidentally. On a day fraught with the potential for tremendous turmoil, I was knee deep in a volunteer job to help organizations raise needed funds. I was so busy, I didn't have time to be upset. What could have been a bad day for my spirit, turned out to be a day filled with a wonderful feeling of success.

When I was a child, my minister suggested we add an activity during Lent to make God's world a better place. He encouraged us to think about the good effect we could have on others, instead of giving up a favorite treat.

Two of today's lessons speak about "works." In the book of John, Jesus says, "Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father."

This passage reminded me of the idea from my youth about helping others, but it also made me think that my actions should reveal that the Lord is within me and therefore in the world.

As it says in the Romans passage for today, even if you can't do such works, there is grace, "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace."

As the days grow somber, there is grace, the unmerited favor of God. Our Lord is embracing all people with his love. Often people return this love with their good deeds toward others.

Therefore in Lent, I'm seeking to tend to my little piece of the world, as if it's a spring garden, by helping people and encouraging our world to flourish.

—Cindy Cotte Griffiths

Friday ~ April 7, 2017

Jer. 29:1, 4-13

Rom. 11:13-24

John 11:1-27, or 12:1-10

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*In memoriam: a devotional submission by Virginia Grier from Lenten Devotional 2015*

Why do you not understand what I am saying? Is it because my teaching is beyond your grasp?  
John 8:43

In this passage Jesus is speaking to the Jewish authorities but he feels the same exasperation with his disciples. His charisma is so strong it attracts men and women from all walks of life, leaving family, home, work, and following Him all the way to the cross, although they never fully comprehend his message. His kingdom of love and peace was beyond their grasp.

We were having a similar experience in the Sunday morning study group, reading Professor Gossai's new book about the Hebrew prophets, trying to relate his scholarly account of God's dealings with the ancient Hebrews to life in our chaotic modern world.

I sometimes wonder what I would do if a strange man claiming to come from God appeared at my door, asking me to join him in a crusade to bring in a new kingdom of love and peace. Would I slam the door in his face?

In the dark days of Lent we long for light, for a surer sense of ourselves as children of God—the God who loves us in spite of our doubts and fears.

“I believe; Lord, help my unbelief.”

—Virginia Grier

Saturday ~ April 8, 2017

Jer. 31:27-34

Rom. 11:25-36

John 11:28-44, or 12:37-50

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As a child, I feared the lurking dark of my closet. To ease my fears, my father installed a small light I could turn on and off. As I grew older and braver, I no longer needed the light to sleep. O how I wish it were like this: just turn on a light, cast away all darkness, and turn to an ever-abiding faith.

These scripture passages not only tell of symbolic stumblings in the dark “because there is no light within” but also of the enlightened, sure-footed times God’s children trust in His wisdom and in Christ’s glory. Jeremiah speaks of the Lord, His depth and wisdom, and assures us with His forgiveness. Even as the Israelites sin and doubt, He plans to “write [law] in their hearts.” In Romans, Paul, too, gives a hopeful sign for doubters for “how unsearchable are His judgements.” And in John, as the once “blind” apostles see Lazarus rise from the dead, their hearts open to Christ’s miracles.

Yet with all of Jeremiah’s promise, Lazarus’ new life, and Paul’s steadfast belief in God’s glory, I can stumble. I can lose my way. But it is in the losing, I can find my way back.

O come Lord, turn on a light, and write it on my heart.

—Summer Hardinge

# *Palm Sunday*

Sunday ~ April 9, 2017

Zech. 9:9-12 1  
Tim. 6:12-16  
Zech. 12:9-11, 13:1, 7-9  
Matt. 21:12-17

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## **Matthew 21:12-17**

This scene from Matthew's gospel depicts Jesus' actions upon entering Jerusalem for the Passover, and crystallizes all of his work as God in history. Jesus upends the status quo of religious and cultural institutions, violently condemning the distorted system of temple sacrifices, originally the foundation of Mosaic worship. Once honoring God the Almighty, sacrificial temple business had devolved to enrich temple elites, financiers, and livestock brokers. All but doves and pigeons were priced out of reach of the poor. The common people had no choice but to participate, if they were to be faithful, and their faith was unquestioning. These were among the "little ones" mentioned elsewhere in Matthew, whom Jesus treasured, and likened to children in their simple faith and pure love of God. In the hinge of this passage, Jesus heals the blind and lame who come to him. His "wonderful" deeds offend leaders of the temple, and they stand off. These men are blind to the work of God, spiritually crippled, unable to walk in God's way. But even these are ultimately within Jesus' dominion. He comes to upend earthly powers and refresh the world. By and in himself, he is the means, the Great Healer of the world, the Reconciler of all people to God. The children sing his praise, "Hosannah, save us!" The babes know: Jesus is Savior of the World.

—The Rev. Margaret C.F. Pollock



# Holy Week

Monday in Holy Week ~ April 10, 2017

Jer. 12:1-16

Phil. 3:1-14

John 12:9-19

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I apologize if this devotion is too confessional. This Lent/Holy Week finds me at low ebb. Our world and our country seem to me to be teetering on the brink of an abyss, and I fear a new Dark Age where humanity once again falls victim to an exhilarating immersion in anger, fear, hatred of the other, leading to cruelty, nastiness, violence, and death. Bullying seems to have become, not an aberration, but public policy. Well, the more things change, the more they stay the same: Jeremiah felt exactly as I do thousands of years ago and he turns on God with a desperate complaint:

*Righteous art thou, O Lord,  
when I complain unto thee;  
Yet I would plead my case with thee.  
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?  
Why do all the treacherous thrive?*

Yet look at our context! We read these words, and join our voice with Jeremiah's, on Monday of Holy Week. The person we worship, and promise to follow, was the greatest teacher of God's love ever, and he was also that love incarnate, and his love and forgiveness got him nailed to a cross. Jesus warns us that God's love is very dangerous and controversial—it threatens the foundations of this world order based on greed, selfishness, and resentment. The Powerful will protect that order; they will not tolerate love and forgiveness. So to follow Jesus and his way is to follow him to the Cross

Rudolf Bultmann once observed: There can be no resurrection from death until there has been a death. Most of us would prefer to skip Holy Week, and especially Good Friday, and go right to Easter, but before resurrection there must be death. The good news (a.k.a. Gospel) is that Death does not get the final word. Jesus calls us beyond fear to new life, beyond death to resurrection.

(St. Paul writes) "Not that I have already obtained this (resurrection) or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Jesus Christ has made me his own. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

We, indeed, live in dark and scary times. The temptation is to get lost in Jeremiah's despair. But Holy Week calls us upward. It calls us to believe that love will finally triumph. Remember the old TV show "Mission Impossible"? Christian faith shows all those plots to have been child's play. That death can turn into life . . . that is the real mission impossible! In a dark time, we are to be Light. In a dark age, Christ Church is to be a place of refuge where God's death-defying love still rules.

—The Rev. Pete Bastien



Tuesday in Holy Week ~ April 11, 2017

Jer. 15:10-21

Phil. 3:15-21

John 12:20-26

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**Lord, Come and Change My Thinking**

There are a lot of things to be changed in the world  
That is also the same in my mind

The key word of today's Gospel is dying or death.  
Jesus told his disciples that the hour of glorified has come.  
It means that the time of death of Jesus has come

Many people think that dying is nothing, emptiness, vanish and fear  
But Jesus said to his disciples that dying is the hour of glorification  
In this parable of 'a grain of wheat falls into the earth,'  
Jesus told that dying is the place where bears much fruit  
This expression is very surprising saying  
Death is not a place where there is nothing or there is no move of life

In the beginning, the earth was a formless and void (Gene.1:1)  
It looks like no move as if the world of dying or death  
But the Bible says that the very formless and void place the Spirit of God was moving.

Dying is not a void place or fruitless desert  
The Spirit of God moves in all creature's dying place  
Dying is the place where we blessed with our fruitful life, glorification and eternal life.  
Through Jesus teaching, I changed my thinking on dying  
To me, dying is not a dreadful or an emptiness place no more  
Every time I hope and pray a lot of my secular thinking changed by Jesus teaching

—The. Rev. Athanasius Choi





**Holy Wednesday    John 12:27-36**

The more I think I understand Holy Week and our Lord's giving of himself for our sake, the more I sense oceans of insight beyond me, still to be discovered. In this passage of John, Jesus laments, "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." And a voice from heaven replies, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

It seems to me that Jesus' deepest desire is to reveal his Father/Mother as fully and clearly as he can, and he receives an affirmation he notes is intended for the crowd around him, and for us. Some witnesses hear thunder, some note an angel was addressing the Holy One. We know via the Gospel writer that this was God. Yet such conversation literally traversing the expanses of heaven and earth was to those first onlookers cloaked in mystery.

I had a teacher long ago declare that to arrive at Christ's resurrection, we must pass through mystery. Today's events bring that to mind, and Arthur J. Gossip beautifully expands such contemplation. He contrasts one man out on a "fine starry night" who barely notices the vista, whilst another "is far away, out in infinite reaches of unthinkable space, amid mighty suns heaped upon suns, and systems piled upon systems, and endless wastes of nebulae, those humming workshops of Almighty God, where tonight and every night, from the beginning to the end of time, the mind and hands of the Eternal are fashioning new worlds, new suns, new universes, hour by hour. To the one it is only some gleaming spots of light; but to eyes that can see, all these immensities and tremendousnesses lie hidden away in and behind the familiar sight. So peer beneath the simplest thing, and before you understand it, it will lead you straight as an arrow to the feet of God.... Just thundering? No. there is more in it than that; always much more....And this whole life of ours, that begins in mystery and ends in mystery, that comes from God and goes to God, is full always both of it and him."\* May God's blessing encompass you as you walk and ponder the holy way of the cross.

\**The Interpreter's Bible: John*. Nashville: 1952. Vol. 8, p. 668.

—The Rev. Cynthia Simpson





Maundy Thursday ~ April 13, 2017

Jer. 20:7-11 1  
Cor. 10:14-17; 11:27-32  
John 17:1-11(12-26)

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**Based on Jeremiah 20:7-11 (Jeremiah 20:9/GNTCE)**

One of the great joys of being a parent is watching your child share something he/she thinks is amazing. Those few moments right before they speak, when you child is just bursting with anticipation, that is my favorite part. When he/she is so super excited that their mouth just drops open, their eyes pop wide out, their body begins to shake, their breathing becomes short and fast, their face changes many different shades of red and the adrenaline makes every electron in the brain explode like fireworks. It's in that moment they just can't help but say what's on their mind. Jeremiah is having this moment with God. He realizes that no matter how hard he tries to hold it in, God's message is too exciting, too important, too amazing to keep secret. Often times we tend to hold back from sharing our faith because of fear. We are afraid of how people will react. Jeremiah laments over being made fun of and ridiculed for sharing God's news. However, Jeremiah realizes that no matter the cost, the Good News is something to share with others.

“But when I say, ‘I will forget the LORD and no longer speak in his name,’ then your message is like a fire burning deep within me. I try my best to hold it in, but can no longer keep it back.”

—The Rev. Patrick Bush  
Assistant Rector, Trinity Church, Tariffville



Good Friday ~ April 14, 2017

Wisdom 1:16—2:1, 12-22 1

Peter 1:10-20

John 13:36-38 or Gen. 22:1-14

John 19:38-42

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**John 19:38-42**

*After these things, Joseph of Arimathea...asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.*

In the Gospel office reading for the evening of Good Friday, we hear the story of Jesus' burial. Noticeably absent from the Biblical story, however, is the tradition that found its way into some of the world's great sculpture and paintings: the depiction of Mary, the mother of Jesus, holding the body of her murdered son on her lap. It is known as "the Pieta," which is the Italian word for "pity." I find myself today with Mary, in stone-cold grief, trying to imagine what she, or any mother, feels upon suffering the death of her child.

For many reasons too numerous to mention here, I am not an admirer of Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*, which was released a number of years ago. And yet, there is one scene in that movie that reduces me to sorrow and tears, and stands out above all others. It shows Mary watching as Jesus is making his way to Calvary, carrying his cross, bloody and exhausted after being savagely scourged. He stumbles, and she suddenly experiences a mental flashback of watching him as a young child, running toward her but then stumbling in the process. Then she was able to take him in her arms and hold him and comfort him—but now she is helpless, and the camera restores us to the present moment, as we see her face with an expression of overwhelming grief.

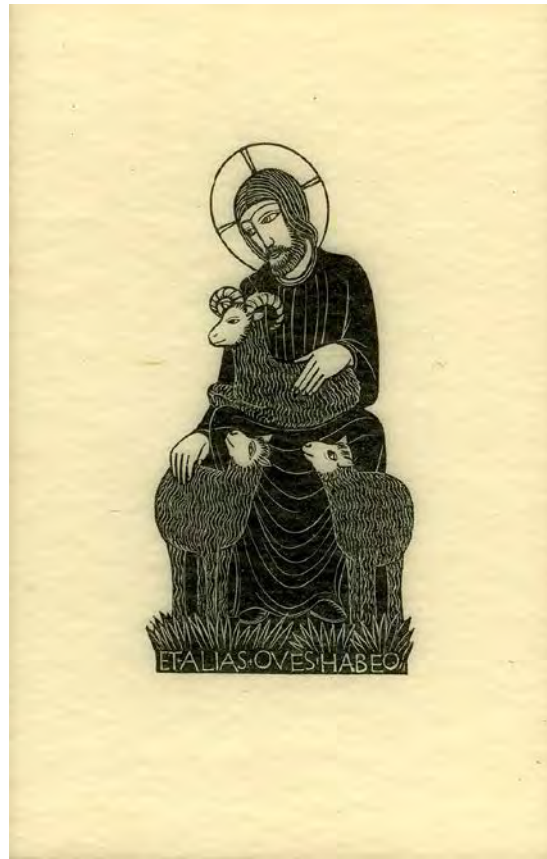
I invite you into Mary's sorrow this day— and into that feeling of life out of control. Many of us are living out these days in a place of fear, as we watch controversial decisions being made in our nation and in the world. Good Friday brings us to a place of helplessness—the One whose goodness and grace we are called to bring to birth in the world is being cruelly slaughtered, and we can only watch, and hold his brokenness in our laps, and wait...having the good fortune to know that the story is not ended, and Sunday's on its way.

Let me share with you the English translation of "Pieta," from Rainer Maria Rilke's cycle of poems entitled *Das Marienleben* (the Life of Mary):

*Now is my misery full. Unutterably  
it fills me. I am numb, as stone  
is numb inside.  
Hard as I am, only one thing I know:  
You grew  
...and grew,  
as if on purpose to stand forth  
as agony too vast  
for my heart to seize and hold,  
Now you lie across my lap—  
Now I can no more  
give birth to you.  
(tr. Bernard Jacobson)*

Lord, have mercy on us all.

—The Rev. John S. McDuffie



Holy Saturday ~ April 15, 2017

Job 19:21-27a

Heb. 4:1-16

Rom. 8:1-11

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Suffering and hardship are not welcome visitors, yet unfazed, they come as they will. I dread when their ugly heads show up in my life, but I also know that enduring difficult times has often resulted in my spiritual growth and in a closer walk with God. Still, too much suffering is bad for the soul. We need joyful times to keep our light kindled. We need balance. Easier said than done. I need help to keep my perspective on suffering. The good news is that Jesus was pained by the suffering he witnessed all around and tried to alleviate it. Jesus did not want suffering to consume us or to bar our relationship with him. Through his passion, he willingly confronted and experienced the worst suffering imaginable and *overcame it*. As a day which falls between the inconsolable sorrow of Good Friday and the immeasurable glory of Easter Sunday, Holy Saturday can easily be neglected in our private and corporate spiritual lives. But, it is truly a glorious day on which we recognize that Jesus traveled to the depths of the cosmos in the process of vanquishing sin and death. It is a day on which pain is transformed into joy—for all of us, forevermore.

— The Rev. George C. Wong



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