

# Walking Through Lent in Community 2016



# Introduction



Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome to Christ Church's sixth 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 sixth Lenten Devotional produced by Christ Church Rockville. Inside you will find meditations written by members of our faith community on the lectionary-appointed scripture readings for each 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 message of the risen Christ.

Thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make this year's Lenten Devotional booklet a reality. A special thanks to Mark Wright for managing the project and laying out the booklet, the Rev. Cindy Simpson for her ongoing assistance and encouragement, Jack Gregory for the cover art, Karen Near for reviewing the draft, Summer Hardinge for her wonderful participation as a writing coach during the January 10 adult forum, and Jeremy Snider for engineering the devotional for inclusion on the CEC website. Much gratitude also goes, of course, to the Rev. John McDuffie for his introduction to this booklet and for his steadfast support of this project.

Fran Palmer  
Chair, Adult Christian Formation Committee

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## Ash Wednesday and Days Following

Ash Wednesday ~ February 10, 2016

Amos 5:6-15

Heb. 12:1-14

Luke 18:9-14

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*“My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.” – Hebrews 12:5-6*

The season of Lent tends to conjure up feelings that we are all worthless and deserve to be punished. After all, as the liturgy of Ash Wednesday reminds us, “We are but dust, and to dust we shall return.” Despite Paul’s advice, I find it very hard not to “lose heart when you are punished by ...[the Lord]” when the Liturgy makes me feel like the residue from the bottom of a shoe wiped on a doormat.

When I was in school, I told my mother about a teacher who seemed to criticize everything I did. My mother suggested that I should appreciate that the teacher felt I had enough aptitude for the subject, so it was worth her time and criticism to help me improve. If she thought I was hopeless, she might not have bothered trying. In the end, the goal of the criticism was to help me learn and grow, not to feel horrible about myself. Perhaps Paul means that, instead of punishing us like naughty children, the Lord seeks to *teach* those whom he loves. Therefore, we should strive to be willing students, eager to learn and grow in our faith.

— Allison Roulier

Thursday ~ February 11, 2016

Hab. 3:1-10(11-15)16-18

Phil. 3:12-21

John 17:1-8

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### **Lent is a Good Time to Try**

In John 17, right before Jesus was betrayed by Judas, the disciples asked him to speak plainly, not with a proverb. They wanted him to give it to them straight. He spoke of eternal life through the one, true God.

After Charlie and I were hit by the car while walking three years ago, I had an otherworldly sensation, which I haven't talked about very much or been able to describe very well. This physical world seemed like a veil or curtain. It wasn't that the earth and all its physical beauty weren't important, but rather that this world was a small, fleeting part of something so much more spectacular.

As it says in today's verse from Philippians, those “whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (19) are not of Christ for “our conversation is in heaven” (20).

Although we need to take care of each other in this life and help the needy and sick, we also need to keep the physical world in perspective. When we think of all the terrible ways we have failed over the years, we can set ourselves to be “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (13). With forgiveness, we can always have a fresh start toward heaven, the eternal life. Lent is a time to pause and consider how.

— Cindy Cotte Griffiths

Friday ~ February 12, 2016

Ezek. 18:1-4, 25-32

Phil. 4:1-9

John 17:9-19

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Recently, family events triggered my recall of some painful old memories and I found myself mulling over some of my destructive behaviors from more than 30 years ago! I felt guilty and unhappy all over again. As if, though being repentant and striving to be a better person, I was not forgiven.

Today's readings bring some insights and comfort. They remind me of God's protection, forgiveness and instruction to us, his people, living in today's world.

In John, Jesus prays for us, asking the Father to protect us from evil and to sanctify us in truth.

Ezekiel (prophet to the Israelites in exile in Babylon) brings comfort to the people by telling them that all lives belong to God. Those who sin must die, but God has no pleasure in the death of anyone, but wants all to turn from their transgressions and live. Expanding the reading to include verses 21–22, God promises that if we repent and do what is right (as Christians, to live as Christ teaches us), none of our transgressions will be remembered against us.

Paul in Philippians instructs us to stand firm in the Lord; to keep on doing the things that we have learned, received and heard, and the peace of God will be with us.

All these words are very freeing. I am prayed for, forgiven and instructed on how to continue to live in Christ. I am assured in repentance that not only are my sins forgiven, they are forgotten by God. My old memory tapes hold no power over me. If I revisit them and feel discouraged, I need to remind myself that God has not left me to such discouragement. He has forgotten my sins, and I am loved, protected and shown how to live. I am free to move on. Thanks be to God!

— Nancy L.

Saturday ~ February 13, 2016

Ezek. 39:21-29

Phil. 4:10-20

John 17:20-26

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Below are excerpts from my three readings:

- God's Oneness (I am the Lord their God) Ezekiel 39:21-29
- God's Love (...that the love you have for me may be in them and I myself may be in them) John 17:20-26
- God's Being (And my God will meet all of your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus) Philippians 4:10-20

The imagery these readings create reminds me of two of my favorite professions of faith, which include all three themes from the above readings: the Nicene Creed and the Sh'ma (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Both teachings confirm the apostolic teachings of one God and provide paths to obey and follow throughout our life. God wants us to follow his righteous way with fully developed moral character. And here are precepts to live by.

The Nicene Creed (which translates as "symbol of faith") serves as a benchmark of my true Christian faith. I love reciting the creed and envision these wonderful words often.

The Sh'ma reaffirms a personal relationship with God's rule of one God and to me is a mini Ten Commandments. It contains the promise of reward. We shall love the Lord, our God, with all of our heart, all of our soul and with all of our might and to teach this diligently to our children. The Sh'ma is a wonderful expression that the Lord is our one true God. As we acknowledge his lordship, our response remains to "hear" him, follow him and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

These two beautifully written beliefs define my faith and my framework for living. They are always in my heart and reflected on at all times.

Blessed be His glorious name

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

— BRJ



# The First Week of Lent

Monday ~ February 15, 2016

Gen. 37:1-11

1 Cor. 1:1-19

Mark 1:1-13

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Seated in a chair in my apartment, surrounded by all my various “things,” I think of the words in Mark 1:3 speaking of John the Baptist—“a voice crying in the wilderness”—and gradually I feel that there could be a sense of wilderness in all these gathered things: the familiar paintings and portraits hanging on the walls, the stored boxes, the “vociferous” clutter and etc. Is my soul a barren place, and so all these “things”? Jesus was in a literal wilderness, tempted by Satan. What are my temptations? Giving in? Denial of truth? For Lent: seeking to know the truth of Jesus.

## **Without Words**

The antics of a small white  
butterfly  
paint the space where grows  
sweet lavender,  
delighting me, awakening my  
sleepy eyes to  
sudden charms in God’s own  
wonderland.  
From smallest ant to winging  
eagle, to  
skittish squirrels and singing  
birds,  
nature entertains us with all  
of these, and  
does so joyfully, even  
without words.

— Phena Darner

Tuesday ~ February 16, 2016

Gen. 37:12-24

1 Cor. 1:20-31

Mark 1:14-28

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Come, follow me.

*MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. – Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude**

Long ago I read Merton's book, *Thoughts in Solitude*, and it made a profound impact on my life. I realized that try as I might I didn't seem to be "following Jesus". What was the way? And here is the answer: "the desire to please you does in fact please you" "And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it." I pray that I never lose the desire to please God.

— Karen Near

Wednesday ~ February 17, 2016

Gen. 37:25-36

1 Cor. 2:1-13

Mark 1:29-45

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Jealousy is an emotion that can lead you to do bad things. In this text, the brothers of Joseph were jealous that he was Jacob's favorite son, so they plotted ways to get rid of him. Eventually, they sold him into slavery and told their father Jacob that he was killed by a wild beast.

In life, you could be jealous about how rich someone is. This might tempt you to steal from them or threaten them. If you are jealous of someone's intelligence, you might be tempted to cheat to get better grades. These are bad things that can get you into trouble. If you steal, you could be sent to jail. If you cheat, nobody will respect you and the school might make you redo the class. When you are jealous and do bad things, a chain reaction occurs that could prevent you from having a good life.

God wants you to be who you are because he has great plans for you. If you try to be someone else, his plans will be gone. God doesn't want you to be jealous, because then you will try to be someone else and then his plans will vanish.

— Andrew Hinds

Thursday ~ February 18, 2016

Gen. 39:1-23

1 Cor. 2:14–3:15

Mark 2:1-12

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Every year the stewardship committee gets together, looks at the scriptures for the kick off Sunday and says, “Could these scriptures be any worse?” My reaction to the verses for today was right down that line—Joseph and the cougar, “My apostle is better than your apostle,” and healing equals forgiving sins. Seriously, there is nothing here that touches my heart strings or makes me happy to be a bible-reading Christian.

As I was contemplating what to write, I received an email from our bishop about the current controversy in the Anglican Communion and our place in it as Episcopalians. It dawned on me, this sort of infighting over issues whether large or small has been a part of our life in community from the earliest days of the church. That human need to be right, the insistence that Apollo’s way is better than Paul’s way or Paul’s way is the only true way, will be with us forever.

Jesus said, “Why do you raise such questions in your heart?” and went ahead and healed the man.

Paul says, “Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

— John Arnold

Friday ~ February 19, 2016

Gen. 40:1-23

1 Cor. 3:16-23

Mark 2:13-22

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### **God with Us**

In the Holy Land many people followed Jesus as He taught and demonstrated God's love for them.

Jesus called to Him twelve disciples who would become messengers of God's love and salvation to all people.

One time, at the home of his disciple, Matthew, Jesus ate with all sorts of people. Some of the Jewish leaders complained that Jesus ate with dishonest tax collectors and sinners. Jesus answered them: "They that are well have no need of the physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus is named Immanuel by an angel who spoke to Joseph before Jesus was born to Mary (Matthew 1:23).

Immanuel means "God with us" and we rejoice that Jesus is God with us!

Jesus speaks words of life and promises to us a place in Heaven with Him!

— Richard Cole

Saturday ~ February 20, 2016

Gen. 41:1-13

1 Cor. 4:1-7

Mark 2:23-3:6

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As a child in rural Virginia, my family and I were tied to the land. The seasons' beauty and fury impacted our daily living in the most basic ways. We respected and expected tough times, using almanacs, weather reports, and signs from nature. My great aunt Merle kept weather journals for more than 70 years. But we knew for all the scientific predictions, weather would not be controlled nor fully predicted. Those unexpected cold snaps or hot spells were "Nature's Way" or "God's Way." We hung together in those times, helped neighbors, and trusted in each other and in the future for kinder seasons.

Now as an adult, I find myself away from a rural place and mountain ways, involved in discussions and worries of changing and unpredictable weather patterns. I know, just as those wise ones did in my childhood mountains, I must be prepared, knowledgeable, and practical about our changing world. But what of the mysteries? Those things which cannot be explained by science or reason?

Today's lessons speak of God's everlasting and all-knowing power and of us as His disciples. Because of Him, Joseph interprets the Pharaoh's dreams of famine and saves the Israelites; Jesus defies temple rules to heal a maimed hand on the holy Sabbath. Paul declares we are all "instruments of God", not to be "puffed up", but serve Him with "compassion" and "justice", aware of a day God will "know the secrets of our hearts." Even in today's world of faith, some things just remain wondrous and mysterious.

So I am reminded of His power and mystery to do His will "in his own time", come any season.

— Summer Hardinge

## The Second Week of Lent

Monday ~ February 22, 2016

Gen. 41:46-57

1 Cor. 4:8-20(21)

Mark 3:7-19a

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In the closing verses of Genesis 41, Joseph has revealed his spiritual gift by interpreting Pharaoh's dream of famine. Also, Joseph provides the solution by overseeing the storage of Egyptian wheat during the years of plenty so as to have food during the years of famine.

I feel that Lent gives us an opportunity to increase storage of a different kind of sustenance. Through prayer, meditation, study and fasting we charge our spiritual batteries. The practice of Lent provides an opportunity to draw near to the Lord and increase our faith.

And it is faith that is the spiritual bread which sustains us through the trials of our own personal famines.

— Stuart Davis

Tuesday ~ February 23, 2016

Gen. 42:1-17

1 Cor. 5:1-8

Mark 3:19b-35

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In these passages from the Book of Mark, Jesus has just chosen his twelve disciples and crowds of people have been following him begging for healing of their afflictions and illnesses. His family wishes to restrain him; many people are saying that he has “gone out of his mind”; and the scribes from Jerusalem say that “by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.”

Jesus then speaks in parables saying, “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand for his end has come.”

These words of Jesus are often quoted verbatim as a strong caution against the destructive power of inner conflict—whether in government, community, households or personally. Focusing on the directive that if Satan is divided then “his end has come” lends itself to the idea that evil itself cannot withstand divisiveness or conflict.

I believe that Jesus is instructing us to tirelessly resolve the conflicts around us and the conflicts within ourselves to bring us closer to God. Jesus has directed all of us to endlessly strive and achieve a faith-filled clarity, harmony and resolution in all aspects of our personal and community lives.

— Frances Palmer



Wednesday ~ February 24, 2016

Gen. 42:18-28

1 Cor. 5:9–6:8

Mark 4:1-20

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These days people seem to spend a lot of time judging one another. Many of our judgments can be quite harsh when we disagree on certain issues that are important to us. Sometimes we fool ourselves that we know more than we actually do about someone because they come from a certain background or belong to a particular political party. The reading from 1 Corinthians reminds me that one must be cautious when judging people whom we don't know well, especially if they are not members of one of "our" groups, be that religious, ethnic, or political. Paul reminds the Corinthians that rather than spending so much energy judging those whom we consider outsiders, we need to judge those who are on the inside—especially, in my opinion, ourselves. What sort of assumptions do we make about people based on the way they dress, where they come from, which presidential candidate they support? Are all of these assumptions accurate? Do we really believe that we are better than someone else because of these things? Do any of them really tell us what is in a person's heart?

The reading from Genesis continues the story of Joseph. Who could blame him if he judged his brothers harshly for the jealousy that led them to sell him into slavery? Ultimately, however, Joseph took pity on his brothers even before he revealed himself to them. He commanded that they be given not only the grain they had come to Egypt to purchase, but provisions for their journey home and a refund of their money. The guilt that the brothers felt for what they had done to Joseph made them afraid rather than grateful for what they received.

Especially during this election year, let us try to be as open hearted as Joseph when we are tempted to judge others based on their choices. Although we should all work to support the causes and candidates that we believe in, let's try not to demonize the other side, but instead attempt to find common ground that will allow us to work together to make the world a better place.

— Amy Ellis

Thursday ~ February 25, 2016

Gen. 42:29-38

1 Cor. 6:12-20

Mark 4:21-34

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Today's readings give us the opportunity to ponder a selection from the bible that has been brought to my attention on several occasions in my life. The words of Corinthians 6:12-20 have become meaningful for me, and remind me of the occasions when I heard others speak of them, times when the passage was helpful somewhat outside the context of the biblical passage.

“Do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

When I was pregnant with my first child, I was turning down an offer of a glass of wine, when a close friend came up to me and said supportively, “Your body is a temple.” I was touched by this, and believe that every expectant mother's body is a temple for two that is never reduced back to a temple of one!

Years later when dealing with my child's food allergies, and the allergist said to him, “Your body is a temple,” the priority of his bodily health was being presented to him. For any parent guiding his or her child through life, teaching the child about responsibility for the child's body, the temple of the spirit, seems so important. I recall my father sitting me down before I left home for college, and asking me what I thought was most important while I was away and on my own. “Getting good grades,” I said (thinking he'd be impressed!). But he smiled and responded, “That's important, but the most important thing is your health.”

Recently, as a group of my real estate colleagues were discussing our desires to be helpful to our clients, and the demands of this work, we discussed the priority of keeping our bodies in shape in order to maintain the capacity to do good work. My colleagues spoke of the body being the vessel or container for our self-expression through work.

Throughout life, how helpful it is to be reminded, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you.... So glorify God in your body!”

— Delia McCormick

Friday ~ February 26, 2016

Gen. 43:1-15

1 Cor. 7:1-9

Mark 4:35-41

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### **Faith versus Fear**

What we are aware of in this Gospel text is that even though Jesus is present in our lives, in fact in our everyday lives as he is here with the disciples, present in the very proximity of our lives, it does not mean that we will not face challenges and not be fearful. Even with the presence of Jesus, we are not excused and exempt from fear and storms. We are reminded by the disciples, that as close as they are to Jesus, literally and figuratively, they still feel fear and panic. We will have storms, and in those moments we have to be reminded that the one who gives life is with us. It is human reality and Jesus uses this moment not only to still the physical storm or the various metaphorical storms that we face in our lives, but instill in us trust: Know that I am here with you in the midst of all the storms.

Even if we read this text over and over again we are left with lingering questions.

1. Do we ever get annoyed or question God when we feel like he is sleeping, ignoring us during the storms of our tough situations?
2. Why was Jesus so hard on his disciples? Why did he rebuke them rather than comfort them as they were in a fearful state?
3. Why did the disciples remain terrified after Jesus calmed the storm?

— Viera Gossai

Saturday ~ February 27, 2016

Gen. 43:16-34

1 Cor. 7:10-24

Mark 5:1-20

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### **A Demon-Possessed Man Is Healed**

This chapter of Mark is about a madman who is possessed by the devil and a legion of demons. When the man encounters Jesus, it becomes clear that Jesus will expel the demons from him. Jesus says, Come out of this man, unclean spirit. Then he asks, What is your name?

The demon says his name is Legion, “for there are many of us” (6,000 is a legion). At that time, there was a herd of swine (pigs) up in the hills and the demons asked Jesus to send them into the swine. When the demons entered the swine, the pigs rushed down the hill into a nearby lake and drown. The man was now in his right mind but when the crowd of people saw this, they were afraid. They asked Jesus to leave.

What drew me to this passage? It is that the New Testament, especially the words of Jesus, are always comforting and help reinforce my faith and belief. The passage demonstrates that Jesus has ultimate power over Satan. It confirms the power of goodness over evil. Even so, the local town’s people were more concerned by the loss of their property than comforted by the miracle they had witnessed.

In today’s world, we can become more focused on our property than believing in how Jesus works in our lives as well as becoming more like Him. The lesson for me is that we must believe in Him in order to witness His miracles in our lives.

— Doug Dawson

# The Third Week of Lent

Monday ~ February 29, 2016

Gen. 44:18-34

1 Cor. 7:25-31

Mark 5:21-43

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Paul has always been a somewhat baffling figure to me, at once relentlessly authoritative and profoundly humble. I suspect that if I heard someone speak like him today, I'd be uncertain as to whether to be impressed by his passion or put off by his unwavering confidence. Much of what he says is taken as... well, as gospel... when so often he prefaces his statements as his "opinion" or "judgment". (Some of these "judgments", in fact, lead to some of our more divisive social disagreements. Look no further than Romans 1:26-27.)

This particular reading goes in a very different direction from how it starts. Paul's initial "judgment" (i.e. opinion) regards celibacy, or more specifically the lack of marriage. (Note that this passage is given in response to questions asked previously by the Corinthians, as well as to the report of an incident imparted in Chapter 5, which—just in case anyone's children come across this Lenten devotional—I will happily refrain from detailing....) Initially his advice reads like a stand-up comedy routine, essentially boiling down to, "Hey, if you're married, fine. If not, great. If you plan on getting married, go for it... but don't say I didn't warn you!" (Insert rimshot here.) The entire debate seemed rather silly to me, to be honest. After all, if everyone decided to avoid marriage, how else would the world continue to give Abraham his descendants "as numerous as the stars in the sky"?

But then Paul clarifies his opinion in a way I wasn't expecting. Indulge me as I reprint the entire passage: "The time we live in will not last long. While it lasts, married men should be as if they had no wives; mourners should be as if they had nothing to grieve them, the joyful as if they did not rejoice; buyers must not count on keeping what they buy, nor those who use the world's wealth on using it to the full. For the whole frame of this world is passing away."

Paul's explanation puts the entire question in a vastly larger context. Our time on this earth is ephemeral. Paul proposes that the question of whether to marry or not is largely insignificant. Anything we experience—the joys of marriage, the pain of sorrow—only lasts as long as we do, and in the larger picture of time our fleeting existence is not even a blink of an eye. As I write this, David Bowie's passing is only seven days old. One of the most moving tweets circulated read: "If you're ever sad, just remember the world is 4.543 billion years old and you somehow managed to exist at the same time as David Bowie." The same could be said of any aspect of our lives. Our bodies could have simply remained stardust, but instead God made us into living beings to share in the wonder of his creation. Our time here may be short, but what we do with that time can make a world of difference. And personally, I'm happy that I have a wife to share it with. :-)

— Tristan Poje

Tuesday ~ March 1, 2016

Gen. 45:1-15

1 Cor. 7:32-40

Mark 6:1-13

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### **Shake It Up During Lent**

Jesus came to his own country and they took offense at him: “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” (Mark 6:2-3)

So Jesus had to limit himself to laying on hands and healing. Since they wouldn't listen to his words, he showed them with actions. Perhaps this is why videos are such a powerful tool for communication in this day and age. People want to see things, not just hear them. If those you are trying to help or instruct won't believe you, show them until they do!

Are we the people in Jesus' home country? Don't hold back the people you know. Our inborn tendency is to stick with the familiar. When someone close to you says they want to do something different, notice how you respond. Listen. Keep the possibilities open. If they go forward, promote them. Hold up what's good in the world for all to see.

Pay attention to how you treat yourself, too. When faced with a new possibility, do you hear your brain saying, “I can't do that.” Do you keep yourself boxed in with tradition doing things the way they have always been done? We become comfortable in our routines.

In Lent, shake things up! Find a way to do things differently. Rather than giving something up, try to add something new, such as a new ministry or new spiritual practice.

Cindy Cotte Griffiths

Wednesday ~ March 2, 2016

Gen. 45:16-28

1 Cor. 8:1-13

Mark 6:13-29



Think of the people you love.  
Think of the world that you love.  
Love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
all your mind,  
and all your soul.

Thursday ~ March 3, 2016

Gen. 46:1-7, 28-34

1 Cor. 9:1-15

Mark 6:30-46

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### **Jesus, Pacesetter**

BLUF. Slow down. Participate in miracles. Email will be there when you return. BLUF: military speak for Bottom Line Up Front. Get to the point. Then, elaborate and explain. Mark is concise. Writes in BLUF style. Doesn't linger or manipulate phrases. Perfect for busy Christians. Like Mark.

So, what happens in the loaves and fishes story? Mark's characteristic brevity might cause us to miss the intriguing pace of the story. A flurry of activity dominates vv 30-34, with the disciples too busy doing Jesus' bidding to even eat, and a crowd of five thousand hurrying on foot to beat Jesus to a remote resting site so they can experience Him. An argument about spending money to buy dinner for the crowd rounds out the fast-paced entry. But then, Jesus slows the pace down—for himself, the disciples, and the hungry throng. He has them sit on the grass, be passive, watch and wait. He turns to heaven and blesses the meal, then performs the well-known miracle of feeding everyone, with baskets of bread and fish to spare. Five thousand have their fill. One imagines this crowd as we are after a Thanksgiving meal: satisfied, content, calm, grateful. Time slows down on the green grass, wherever that place was (we don't quite know, do we?). Christ performs a miracle, for thousands, for all who could sit down, slow down, long enough to participate in it. Pause for a moment with the disciples on the grass. A miracle just happened, and we read about it. What other miracles might there be on our own grassy slopes, in our own lives, this Lent and beyond? Will we see them? Will we participate? How?

Dinner's over. Pace picks up. Jesus moves the disciples out. Puts them on a boat. Next stop, Bethsaida. Great story, l + f. Am busy this month. Lots going on at work. Out of town on business last week. Catching up. Writing Lenten reflection. Due tonight. Must finish. Note to self: pause for miracles all around me. Share. Repeat.

— Katherine Schexneider



Friday ~ March 4, 2016

Gen. 47:1-26

1 Cor. 9:16-27

Mark 6:47-56

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### **Balancing the Gospel with Events in the Backdrop**

Although these events occurred discretely at different times, the unifying connection among them was the divine rescue of the people by a designated servant. In the book of Genesis, the rivalries among siblings unwittingly placed Joseph in Egypt to pave the way for welcoming the remaining sons of Jacob during the time of great famine; in the book of Mark, the disciples were unable to grasp the full meaning in the miracles Jesus performed by feeding of the crowd and calming the wind at sea; and in the book of 1 Corinthians, the struggling Christians were uplifted by Paul's counsel of seeing themselves as athletes running a race with their eyes set on winning the prize. From Joseph to Jesus and to Paul, the powerful messages conveyed were timely and dependable.

It is noteworthy that as time changed, the same challenges of the ancient past still pervade our modern time, which calls for reexamination of our role with respect to events occurring in the backdrop. The composite lesson to be learned is to stay focused on the gospel while attending to matters of everyday needs that arise in the course of time. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, our church is coordinating efforts and resources to feed the hungry while being actively involved with delivering the gospel to the entire humanity.

— Ken Ekechukwu

Saturday ~ March 5, 2016

Gen. 47:27–48:7

1 Cor. 10:1-13

Mark 7:1-23

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*29 When the time of Israel's death drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt. 30 When I lie down with my ancestors, carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." 31 And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself on the head of his bed. – Genesis 47:29–31*

The author of Genesis makes Jacob's death out to be a rather organized, stately affair. In his final days, Jacob, we're told, had the opportunity to reflect on his legacy and impart his wishes to those he loved. He wanted his final resting place to be the burial site of his ancestors (which we learn two chapters later is a certain cave in Canaan). He conveyed this to his son Joseph, who swore that he'd carry out his father's plans.

We see Jesus, by contrast, wrestle more with his mortality (if I may be permitted to peek ahead a few weeks in Lent). I imagine that Jesus had many questions for God. Would he be remembered as a condemned criminal, or remembered at all? How would he bid farewell to this world? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Even if God can conquer death, the end of life is still profoundly difficult for our human selves to fathom—and that, Jesus shows us, is alright.

I lost my mother to cancer last November. One afternoon a few days before she passed, Mom lay in bed at her home—the house in which I grew up and where she'd lived nearly four decades of her life. As she looked out her bedroom window, her gaze fell upon a small tree in the backyard whose mostly barren branches were swaying gently, a cloudless Texas sky outstretched above. "This world God made is so beautiful," she said wistfully. "I don't think I'm quite ready to go."

I wonder if Jacob or Jesus had ever thought that same thing.

— Victor Ban

## The Fourth Week of Lent

Monday ~ March 7, 2016

Gen. 49:1-28

1 Cor. 10:14–11:1

Mark 7:27-37

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*“We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table.” – Mark 7:27-37*

Jesus encounters a Gentile woman. She begs him to heal her daughter, who is possessed by a devil. He challenges her by asking whether she is fit to ask him for God’s healing. He seems to harshly insult her and dismiss her, likening her to a dog that should not beg for food at the table. Instead of retreating from Jesus, as I admit I would likely do in such a situation (either in anger or in shame), she persists and retorts that even a pet dog would deserve the scraps under the table.

Is it her persistence that makes Jesus stop repudiating her? Did he really intend to deny her God’s healing grace? I am not sure why he changes his mind and performs a healing miracle on the woman’s daughter. Perhaps he wanted to show the crowd that a person must have great faith in God and must persistently and continually ask God for mercy.

This woman’s response to Jesus shows her persistence, her faith, and her recognition that God’s power in Jesus is so great that she only needs a tiny crumb of it to heal her daughter. Jesus responds by performing the miracle she seeks.

We all must be so bold and relentless in asking Jesus for his healing power.

— Mary Barnstead

Tuesday ~ March 8, 2016

Gen. 49:29–50:14

1 Cor. 11:17-34

Mark 8:1-10

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*So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them to do; they carried his body to Canaan....* – Genesis 50:12-13 (Good News Bible)

Jacob wants to go home, back to Canaan to be buried in the same cave that is the final resting place of grandparents, Abraham and Sarah, and a host of other relatives. But Jacob and his people have spent the last 17 years exiled in Egypt, not quite slaves but not free either. The Egyptian king, however, recognizes Jacob's leadership and commands that "all the king's officials, the senior men of his court, and all the leading men of Egypt" escort the body back to Canaan.

All of us long to be Home, to be in that idealized place where we can be accepted for ourselves. We long to be loved for who we are, not what we do. We long to belong.

This past year over 1 million people sought asylum in Europe, fleeing conflicts in Syria, Nigeria, the Ukraine and many other places, leaving behind their homes, their professions, their communities—all those things that we who are not refugees take for granted. Just like Jacob, these refugees will spend long years away from Home, longing to belong.

During this season of Lent, may we create a space in our lives for refugees and others who long to belong.

— Mary Belknap

Wednesday ~ March 9, 2016

Gen. 50:15-26

1 Cor. 12:1-11

Mark 8:11-26

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When it became obvious that Joseph, the youngest of Jacob's twelve sons, had become his father's favorite, Joseph's brothers were filled with hatred, "...and could not speak peaceably to him." (Gen. 37:4) They began to plot against their younger brother, even throwing him into an empty well to die. Fortunately, Joseph was rescued, but not without considerable suffering and torment.

Joseph went on to become "... ruler over all the land of Egypt..." (Gen. 45:25), the Minister of Agriculture, so to speak. He fed the people of Egypt and stored grain for times of famine. He kept people alive. His brothers went on to become vessels of jealousy, envy and malice.

Years later when Jacob died, Joseph's brothers begged for their brother's forgiveness. Whether this was done out of fear of retribution, or was an act of sincere repentance and amendment of life, is a subject for discussion. Nevertheless, Joseph again shows his penchant for compassion and forgiveness. He wept before his brothers and said to them, "...Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So, do not fear...." (Gen. 50:19-21) Joseph forgave his brothers, he reassured and comforted them, he spoke kindly to them.

As I contemplate this profound act of forgiveness, I wonder if I am capable of such deep love, such all encompassing forgiveness for those who have hurt and injured me—and what about those whom I have hurt? Am I willing to completely empty myself of the anger and bitterness, and allow myself to heal and to love, to ask others for forgiveness? Are you?

— Janice Musselman

Thursday ~ March 10, 2016

Exod. 1:6-22

1 Cor. 12:12-26

Mark 8:27--9:1

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*1 Cor. 12:12-26*

I am meditating on this passage having just put down today's *Washington Post* where I learned the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. was suspended for three years from the Anglican Community for, among other sins, allowing its clergy to perform same-sex marriages. This story of exclusion is now contrasted in my mind with Paul's writings of inclusiveness.

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—all were made to drink of one Spirit. . . . If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honored, all rejoice together."

Paul describes a variety of ways to be a disciple and the spiritual gifts associated with each. In doing so, he observes, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

For those of us who do not speak in tongues, perform miracles, or prophesy, he provides another path. "I will show you a still more excellent way." And what he puts forward has become the reading used in nearly every Christian wedding ceremony. I'm sure you know it . . . "love is patient and kind . . . love does not insist on its own way . . . if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

The *Post* article noted the Communion's action was based on traditional teaching of scriptures, but their action seems totally at odds with Paul's expression of Christian love in Corinthians and Jesus' commandment that:

" . . . you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your strength.' and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

We are not to apply this commandment only to those groups of which we approve. As hard as it is, we are commanded to apply it to all humanity.

— Jack Gregory

Friday ~ March 11, 2016

Exod. 2:1-22

1 Cor. 12:27–13:3

Mark 9:2-13

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*1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. – 1 Corinthians 13:1-3*

“Though I may speak some tongue of old  
Or even spit out some holy word  
I have no strength from which to speak  
When you sit me down, and see I'm weak.”  
– Mumford & Sons, “Not With Haste”

This may not be surprising to many of you, but often the way I connect most strongly with my faith is through music. Clearly the lyrics from one of my favorite songs mirror very closely the words written in 1 Corinthians.

The hardest part about “having love,” in my experience, is knowing when to give it away, and to whom. There are many different types of love: that which we have for friends and family, for our partners, and even for our enemies. But here God tells us, in no uncertain terms, that we must love everyone. This will undoubtedly be exhausting, in a way that is very different from our desire to obtain knowledge or give to charity. Without love and empathy, however, our time on Earth is misspent. To love is the most worthwhile endeavor of all, and though Lent is typically a time for solemn reflection, God also urges us not to forget our ultimate goal.

— Casey Parker

Saturday ~ March 12, 2016

Exod. 2:23–3:15

1 Cor. 13:1-13

Mark 9:14-29

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*“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” – 1 Corinthians 13:1-13*

## **LOVE**

We need to learn how Jesus loved, how God loved, and follow their footsteps. Jesus represents and is God’s love for us. We need to learn that God loves us, and we can love everybody, God, and Jesus. That is why we need to learn about Jesus’s and God’s teachings, especially about love.

— Esmé Pickel



## The Fifth Week of Lent

Monday ~ March 14, 2016

Exod. 4:40-20(21-26)27-31

1 Cor. 14:1-19

Mark 9:30-41

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*30 From there Jesus and his followers went through Galilee, but he didn't want anyone to know it. 31 This was because he was teaching his disciples, "The Human One[a] will be delivered into human hands. They will kill him. Three days after he is killed he will rise up." 32 But they didn't understand this kind of talk, and they were afraid to ask him.*

*33 They entered Capernaum. When they had come into a house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about during the journey?" 34 They didn't respond, since on the way they had been debating with each other about who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be least of all and the servant of all." 36 Jesus reached for a little child, placed him among the Twelve, and embraced him. Then he said, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn't actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me."*

*38 John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone throwing demons out in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn't following us."*

*39 Jesus replied, "Don't stop him. No one who does powerful acts in my name can quickly turn around and curse me. 40 Whoever isn't against us is for us. 41 I assure you that whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will certainly be rewarded."*

– Mark 9:30-41



Tuesday ~ March 15, 2016

Exod. 5:1–6:1

1 Cor. 14:20-33a, 39-40

Mark 9:42-50

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*“You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle.” – Exodus 5:7-8*

Thus commands Pharaoh when refusing the plea of Moses and Aaron to let the enslaved Israelites go to the desert for three days for a religious feast. Bricks without straw—the same amount of work with fewer resources, be either broken by the labor or punished for failing. How many of us feel as if we are desperately trying to keep up with the bricks/emails/demands from all sides? Pharaoh, who doesn’t know the God of Israel and probably considers Him a weak and unimportant god (look who His people are—poor and powerless), not only refuses to let the Israelites go but makes it even harder for them to think about, much less practice, their faith—too busy, no time for our God. We know the story, so we know deliverance is near. “But the Lord said to Moses, ‘Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.’” (Exodus 6:1) Deliverance from bondage; we will never be slaves again. Freedom is the promise for those who belong to God. But before deliverance, what hardships! Plague upon plague. Why did God make it so hard when he could have made it easy? Do we need to be tested and stretched in order to handle freedom?

— Julia Van De Wille

Wednesday ~ March 16, 2016

Exod. 7:8-24  
2 Cor. 2:14–3:6  
Mark 10:1-16

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*“For we are the aroma of Christ for God.” (2 Cor. 2:15)*

The smell of chlorine wafts through the air, the sweet smell of apple pie lingers in the air, and/or the faint scent of perfume; smells have a way of taking us back. Odors have the ability to draw on our emotions and memories. We can recognize thousands of smells, each one potentially being a trigger to the past. Our nose has a way of sniffing out nostalgia.

Maybe it’s because our noses are designed that way. The olfactory system, which is responsible for distinguishing smells, stimulates the areas of the brain that are responsible for emotions and memories. Odors help us remember how and what we were feeling more so than the actual details of the memory. Paul reminds the young church at Corinth that our way of life, as Christians, produces a particular aroma for God. Oddly, though, this aroma isn’t sweet smelling and pleasing for everyone.

As Christians, we are called to live differently and distinctly in the world. Everyone should know we are Christian by how we welcome others in love, support others in need, care for others in illness, visit others in isolation, and give hope to others that are in darkness. These actions do not come easy, but when we do them an aroma is given off that is pleasing to the one who matters, God. We shouldn’t be concerned with how people receive or interpret our actions, but we are called to live consistently responding in like manner to both those “who are being saved” and to those “who are perishing.” Because that truly makes us the aroma of Christ for God and for the world.

— The Rev. Patrick Bush

Thursday ~ March 17, 2016

Exod. 7:25–8:19

2 Cor. 3:7-18

Mark 10:17-31

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A friend recently summarized to me a quote, originated by author and motivational speaker Les Brown, that was so powerful I never forgot it. The quote talks about the graveyard being the richest place on Earth because of all of the unfulfilled dreams and hopes that people are afraid to carry out when they are alive. I was surprised that I had not heard that particular quote before, but in that moment, it was a revelation and a motivation for me.

In Mark's reading today taken from the 10th chapter, verses 17-31, we hear the words of Jesus telling the rich man to go and sell what he has and give to the poor because he will be richer still for doing that. As we all know, our God is a jealous God who has made it clear that we should not serve anyone but Him, that he is the "Bread and the Life". The attachment we have to our wealth, our things, our valuables are not of His kingdom. In order to enter His kingdom we have to let go of those things and walk in faith with Him.

I suppose in some ways when I think of what God is asking us to do, it is to share what we have, not just in the sense of wealth, but also our wealth of information. I remembered talking to a friend a few months ago who was job hunting and I was using my networking and job search skills to help her in her search. As our conversation progressed and we talked about how difficult things can get dealing with unemployment, she said something that surprised me. She said that even though I had lost a lot by way of lost pay and wages in the past, that I was rich. She continued to say that by using my skills and talents to help her and others that I was rich in spirit. I took her statement to heart because I know that she was speaking from a place of love and appreciation. I felt the spirit in that moment—I was overwhelmed with a sense of peace and humility.

Eternal life promises that we will have more than we would ever need and we will receive more than we ever imagined. The "here and now" is also filled with promise, but it is in sharing what we know and what we have with others that truly makes our lives rich. I hope to continue giving and sharing each and every day. My prayer for you is that you find that wealth within you to share so that the graveyard becomes less rich and the life eternal becomes even richer with your spirit.

Amen.

— Shona Bramble

Friday ~ March 18, 2016

Exod. 9:13-35

2 Cor. 4:1-12

Mark 10:32-45

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*Mark 10:32-45*

Jesus strides toward Jerusalem, hurtling toward his final terrible and mighty work. He tells the disciples that Jewish authorities will condemn him to death, then occupying Romans will humiliate and kill him. Two disciples, James and John, respond to this dismaying news, not with concern, but with an audacious demand that Jesus do anything for them, anything. What they want is to share his power and glory.

These two come from a family of means. Their father, Zebedee, owns a prosperous fishing business. Their mother, Salome, provides material support to Jesus. In worldly terms, James and John would qualify for prominence. Clearly, they consider themselves entitled.

But haven't they learned anything in their three years sharing Jesus' ministry? Haven't they learned the primacy of self-giving love?

To me it is as if Jesus extends the holy chalice, symbol of his utmost sacrifice, to the sons of Zebedee, and they knock it out of his hand. What's the chalice of Christ's blood worth to them, compared to the power and glory they crave? Good Lord, never let me walk in their shoes, however privileged I might imagine myself. And let me forgive these men who eventually learned the nature of glory, and became apostles of the church.

— The Rev. Margaret C. F. Pollock

Saturday ~ March 19, 2016

Exod. 10:21–11:8

2 Cor. 4:13-18

Mark 10:46-52

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*21 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. 23 No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. – Exodus 10:21-11:8*

### **Darkness We Can Feel**

I'm great at scaring myself silly in the dark. As a teenager, I once came in from a late night out and left the light off in the bedroom I shared with my brother while quietly hanging my clothes in the closet so as not to wake him. Bad idea. While facing the closet the hair stood up on the back of my neck, for I was suddenly, inexplicably, sure that upon turning around I would see my brother sitting up in bed sporting a bedeviled grin while his head swiveled like Linda Blair's noggin in *The Exorcist*.

Those of us with wobbly faith and an easily influenced imagination know well the hot air of fear that blows the human mind up like a balloon, pumped gleefully by our inner demons with their fiery bellows. Surely those bellows were working overtime in the superstitious imaginations of those poor ancient Egyptians upon whom God laid that smothering three-day night. Holy smoke!

Lent calls me to face my own darkness, to at least tolerate it if I cannot fully embrace it, to grope around in it for clues to shrouded mysteries—or simply for shreds of faith that God is somehow present. In such darkness, St. Paul's words can sound ironic: “we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”

Lent is the time to pray that darkness will last but a season; that God will someday bear us out beyond the meager range of both our eyes and our imaginations; that we might sense God even in this present darkness; and that bumping around in the nighttime of our soul will both humble and embolden us to call out to Jesus, like blind Bartimaeus: “Rabbi, I want to see.”

— Mark Wright

# Palm Sunday

Sunday ~ March 20, 2016

Zech. 9:9-12\*\*; Zech. 12:9-11; 13:1,  
7-9\*\*\*

1 Tim. 6:12-16\*\*; Luke 19:41-48\*\*\*

\*\*Intended for use in the morning

\*\*\*Intended for use in the evening

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## **Luke 19:41-48 ~ Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem and Cleanses the Temple**

As I delved into this gospel to my surprise I first felt comforted. These verses tumble through a confusing mixture of faith-filled disciples and spellbound crowds contrasted with religious leaders hell-bent on their quest to end our Lord's life.

Luke attests in the scene immediately preceding that Jesus' ride into Jerusalem focuses entirely upon his disciples' devotion to him. Observes writer Fred Craddock, "There is no ovation by the general crowds that are in the city for the festival...Jesus is honored and praised by his followers." He continues, "his disciples did not fully understand his messiahship, to be sure, but neither are they persons who sing praise and scream death the same week." (Interpretation: Luke. Fred Craddock. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990, pp. 226-227.)

Ah what good news. I wonder if such tribute from those who loved him soothed Jesus as he gazed upon this golden city and wept. Reverence paid him gives way to his lament that so many do not recognize who he is. Quickly his grief moves to anger as he enters the temple courtyards, the supreme gathering place for worship more resembling a "den of robbers." So he drives out the merchants, resolutely fixed upon his mission no matter the outcome. Craddock notes that Luke's account of this "cleansing" is the shortest of all the Gospels, reflecting Jesus' intent to purify rather than destroy. More to the point, Jesus makes this sacred space his classroom, daily in session, with the result that "all the people were spellbound by what they heard."

Faithful followers begin this first day of Holy Week celebrating Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, and crowds captivated by his teaching end it. This One was not utterly rejected by Jerusalem: yet he saw his earthly demise ahead—plus that of this great city—and he lamented the agony of both. All the while he continued to minister to throngs who drew near to him and brought correction to the House of Prayer where he rooted himself, fully aware of the consequences he would suffer.

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I embrace this prayer from J. Philip Newell as my intention and desire in the face of such extraordinary love:

O Brother Jesus  
who wept at the death of a friend  
and overturned tables in anger at wrong  
let me not be frightened by the depths of passion.  
Rather let me learn the love and anger  
and wild expanses of soul within me  
that are true expressions of your grace and wisdom.  
And assure me again that in becoming more like you  
I come closer to my true self  
made in the image of outpouring Love  
born of the free eternal Wind.

*(Celtic Benediction: Morning and Night Prayer. J. Philip Newell. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000, p. 23.)*





# Holy Week

Monday in Holy Week ~ March 21, 2016    Lam. 1:1-2, 6-12  
2 Cor. 1:1-7  
Mark 11:12-25

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Now I stand in the yard of Holy Week  
Lenten season is special to me, but Holy Week is most special to me  
In Holy Week I concentrate my mind to hear the voice of the Lord and to see my  
everyday life

Whenever I read the Gospel, Mark 11:12-25,  
I think that the fig tree was like me, and  
I imagine that as if I was same the Jerusalem temple

I don't understand fully why Jesus rebuked the fig tree for reason of it was no fruit.  
Because that time the fig tree was not the season, it is not strange that the tree has no fruit  
The point is that Jesus find fruit but the tree stand there without fruit  
The Scripture say that the tree is a plenty of leaves  
Then it looks like a very beautiful tree, maybe it becomes a good object of camera or arts  
It has a broad shade of a tree many, maybe some people rest under the tree  
But it has no figs  
The fig tree has not most important being  
The important essence of fruit tree is whether it produces fruit or not  
Therefore Jesus rebuked the fig tree that bore no fruit  
Here the fig tree means scribes and priest that there is no true fruit

Temple story that Jesus cleaned is very easy to understand.  
At that time, Jerusalem temple is not a temple, maybe it looks like a marketplace  
Marketplace is not a wrong or bad, marketplace is very useful and needed place for  
people  
But the problem is that temple becomes as if the market, selling and buying and moving  
many things  
There is no place and no time for prayer and worship  
There is no mind that pure and silent and clear and empty  
Because during selling and buying all mind controlled by profit or gain and all mind  
become greedy.

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Some poor people's mind were wounded or hurt by dishonest business and all mind become fall into sadness  
Therefore Jesus scolded them that you changed this holy temple a den of robbers and all mind changed not to fit "My house, a house for all nations"

In Holy Week,  
I look around my mind and my everyday life especially as a Christian.  
When Jesus comes to me to see whether he would find anything for kingdom of God,  
Do I have a plenty of fruit?  
When Jesus came to me,  
Do I live as a temple of the Holy Spirit? (1 Cor. 6:19)  
That is my Holy Week question

My Lord bless me;  
To live as a good fruit Christian as well as a plenty of leaves  
To live as a temple of Holy Spirit and good Christian who have the essence of your discipleship

—The Rev. Athanasius Choi



Tuesday in Holy Week ~ March 22, 2016    Lam. 1:17-22  
2 Cor. 1:8-22  
Mark 11:27-33

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By today's episode in Mark's Gospel, Jesus' story is filled with a stunning array of miracles and teachings that had infuriated the Temple leaders. They want him dead. As the story opens, they are searching for justification to arrest him and set in motion his execution. So they question the source of his authority. Any answer he gives, they surmise, will discredit him. But Jesus says he will only answer their question if they will answer his. He then asks a question to which any response they give would expose their own bankrupt authority. So is Jesus playing a game of one-upmanship here, intent on beating his opponents at their own game? Or is something else going on?

A recent group guided meditation has shaped my reflections on this question. It invited us to see in our mind's eye a person known to have become ensnared in a lifestyle of sinful influences and choices; to see how corrosive these have become to the person's own goodness; and how they have resulted in others being hurt. Right away I began thinking about Tashfeen Malik, the young Pakistani mother and radical jihadist shooter in the San Bernardino massacre. She was killed in the shootout with police later that day. The meditation guide invited us to imagine the effects of God's infinite mercy on this person; to watch understanding and forgiveness flow into her awareness; to watch her fundamental goodness reawaken.

I catch sight of God's gaze meeting Tashfeen's as she departed this world. God's gaze was filled with a kind of burning clarity concerning her sin. It was shared with her until she almost collapsed in horror and grief at her own culpability. She became fully aware of the anguish, devastation, and loss she had caused, including that to her now orphaned six-month old baby. Her guilt and remorse are almost unbearable. But God's searing clarity is also filled with such merciful understanding that instead of collapsing into a hell of despair, she falls into God's loving arms. The meditation guide continued, asking us to review this meditation and draw some understanding from it. Right away I hear Jesus on the cross crying out, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." I can feel its poignancy more deeply than ever. That, of course, is part of the Good Friday story, and today is only Tuesday in Holy Week. But I think what we have in today's Gospel story may be a foretaste of what is coming.

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Yes, Jesus does use the same clever question strategy in responding to his opponents, but not in a game of one-upmanship. They had used the strategy against him, whereas he uses it for them. They used it to trap him into something that would mean his death. He uses it to free them that they might have life. He is offering awareness of their sin, just as God did with Tashfeen, that they might see—and mourn—the truth, painful as it is, and discover that it makes them free. For the truth of their corruptibility is met with the larger truth of life-giving mercy. On Friday we will hear Jesus cry out, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.” On Tuesday I believe he was hoping they might gain the knowledge of what they were doing and not deepen their need for mercy. They refused.

It’s Tuesday again. What about us?

— The Rev. Karen Johnson



Wednesday in Holy Week ~ March 23, 2016    Lam. 2:1-9  
2 Cor. 1:23–2:11  
Mark 12:1-11

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In the corner of the tradition in which I grew up (High Church, Confessional German Lutheranism), Wednesday in Holy Week is popularly known as “Spy Wednesday” because of its focus on Judas Iscariot and his betrayal of Jesus. Judas has been cast as the great villain of all history. No one names a beloved son Judas! Dante placed him at the very bottom of hell, immured in ice next to Satan himself. If someone is an arch-betrayer, we call him “a Judas.” Yet, I have always had a soft spot for the guy. In my theological fancy, when Judas hanged himself and died, he fell, not into the yawning abyss of hell, but into the arms of a forgiving and loving Savior.

Now, I must confess that this is not just charity on my part; it is, instead, self-preservation. You see, I AM JUDAS. I betray Christ every day. (As with Peter I deny him, and with Thomas I doubt him.) I see Judas, as does St. John in his Gospel, as a tragic figure. Am I sure I'm better than he? How often in my life have I ducked when I should have stood up for Christ? Luther once said that the worst possible blasphemy against God is to call yourself a Christian and then behave like a devil. Hatred, bigotry, greed—often in the Name of Christ—are everywhere in our culture and in our churches. We thus betray and profane the Name of Christ.

Here's what I celebrate on Spy Wednesday: My love for God, for Jesus, is a broken love, vacillating, partial, self-interested, off/on. But God's love for me, even if I'm named Judas, is unbroken, steadfast, whole, sacrificial, and always ON. God does not love me because I'm good, or insofar as I'm good. God loves the unholy mess that is “me.” Holy Week shows how far that love goes—all the way to Golgotha.

— The Rev. Peter Bastien



Maundy Thursday ~ March 24, 2016

Lam. 2:10-18

1 Cor. 10:14-17; 11:27-32

Mark 14:12-25

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We are reminded as we travel through the Season of Lent, and now on this Maundy Thursday, that this journey to light and life will make its way through darkness and death. We are reminded that there is no shortcut. In both the texts from Lamentations and the Gospel of Mark, we have such an outpouring of grief and sadness, longing for what was, but also hope for what is to come. Sometimes when we cannot imagine what lies ahead, we conclude that what is, will always be the way life is. Often it is in the wilderness or exile of our lives that we are reborn, and nothing about the landscape suggests ease. But this is not the last word.

As we face Maundy Thursday and then into Good Friday and Holy Saturday, we face a difficult period of in-betweenness; a liminal time, a time of neither here nor there; a time of holy waiting. A time when we hear the pain in the words of the writer of Lamentations or Jesus in Mark and not rush to push that grief away. But instead, we see and hear these words, exile and hunger, bowed down and fainting, hopelessness and despair; we hear Jesus speak of his betrayal, by one who shares the intimacy of a meal together. In these days we linger over these moments, and for a while let these moments become our moments.

What we have is an invitation to share our burdens and our grief; an invitation that recognizes that we will all have these times, for they are a part of the landscape of our lives. It is an integral part of being human. But we also know that part of being human is to be in community, in shared care and responsibility; in the company of other saints. We look through the darkness and we know that the light will come. As we travel through this time, I invite you to share with Levi Yizchak a prayer that he wrote knowing that finally in all aspects of life, it is God to whom we turn.

Where I wander—You  
Where I ponder—You  
Only You, You again, always You!  
You! You! You!  
When I am gladdened—You!  
When I am saddened—You!  
Only You, You again, always You!  
You! You! You!

The Rev. Dr. Hemchand Gossai



Good Friday ~ March 25, 2016

Lam. 3:1-9, 19-33

1 Pet. 1:10-20

John 13:36-38\*\*; John 19:38-42\*\*\*

\*\*Intended for use in the morning

\*\*\*Intended for use in the evening

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The Apostle Peter wrote his epistle, which instructs us on the calling of a Christian, during his exile in Babylon. He was carrying out the work that the Lord had entrusted to

him—"to tend my sheep." (John 21:17)

Peter's epistle is directed toward us, the believers, the chosen ones. You and I take part in the message.



Remember that our faith rests on the foundation of the three persons of the divinity—God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ, the Savior. God sets his chosen people apart in light of the special witness that He has called them to follow. The Holy Spirit blesses the souls of believers with holiness and the spirit. And God calls us to his own glory, purifying Christians from their sins through the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 25:27)

The Apostle Peter exhorts us to holiness, greater awareness, and love. He urges us to achieve holiness

through a personal, ongoing relationship with God that can be attained by strengthening and purifying our thoughts, which ultimately become the source of all conduct, good and bad.

This Period of Devotion is a moment for profound intercession with the saints and with a strong spiritual power. It is a time when Christians should become more aware by identifying closely with God's true divine nature—the same holiness to which we join our liturgical prayers.

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Like the Apostle Peter, we can carry out our own apostolate of enlightenment, charity, purity, and virtue by using the courage that we find in obeying God and following the message that Christ has revealed to us.

So, let us be aware of God's intentions for us. Let us understand that a believer's life, both personally and communally, is in all its forms and appearances truly the work of a divine power, the Holy Spirit.

A life led truly in the Christian faith cannot accept the decadence that mankind has created in the world. Instead, we must reject corruption in the world by embracing God's new life for us and receiving the spiritual energy that He has promised to all his saints.

— The Rev. Jules Ntumba





Holy Saturday ~ March 26, 2016

Lam. 3:37-58

Heb. 4:1-16\*\*

Rom. 8:1-11\*\*\*

\*\*Intended for use in the morning

\*\*\*Intended for use in the evening

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*My friend and neighbor you have put away from me, and darkness is my only companion*  
– Ps. 88:19

For parish clergy, Holy Saturday is a busy day. We are often preparing people for Holy Baptism at the Easter Vigil later that evening, putting finishing touches on an Easter Sunday sermon, and visiting persons who are ill or who are otherwise unable to join in services at church. And it may be a busy day for many of the rest of you as well—getting Easter festivities ready for children, decorating a church for the festivities to come, getting all the fixings for an Easter Sunday family meal, or greeting out-of-town friends or relatives who have come to visit.

But if we can be still for a moment and look on this day from a spiritual perspective, it is the most numbingly quiet day of the Church's year. If you have ever known deep grief

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from the death of a loved one, you know how you may sit sometimes, completely inert, unable to move, and simply embrace the dark void that is within you and around you. Life will never be the same as it was. You may feel that there is no way forward—he or she whom you loved has been taken from you—and if there is any movement at all, it is along an interior backward road of regret. You can only sit, and wait—but wait without hope, for hope would be for the wrong thing, as T.S. Eliot said in the Four Quartets.

Holy Saturday is a day of waiting. It is not like the waiting that is characteristic of the season of Advent, filled with the expectation of new beginnings (“for unto us a child is born, a son is given”) that is a quiet crescendo into joy. This is a waiting in darkness, a darkness that is only broken by the dawn of a new day that carries with it an impossible surprise, and a beckoning into a previously unimagined reality.

When I attended a grief support group many years ago, the most helpful thing that the group leader ever said was at the end of a particular meeting in which one could feel the heavy darkness that colored the collective mood of the group. “Be prepared for surprises,” said the group leader with a calm, steady voice.

I invite you into a period of waiting today, of waiting without any familiar expectation, but of waiting for the advent of life-changing surprises that will move you forward. And if any of you are in a time of genuine grief in your lives, I pray that somewhere in the darkness you may know that in an unexpected moment, in a way you had not previously imagined, that there will be a new life for you.

— The Rev. John McDuffie



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