



LENT

St. John in the Wilderness

Lenten Reflections

2021

An Invitation to the Observance of a Holy Lent

Welcome to Lent at St. John in the Wilderness in Flat Rock, NC. Welcome to Lent in the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Communion, and in Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. We join with billions of Christians around the world who embark on a sacred journey this season towards the cross and empty tomb. Or, as we like to sing, now we begin "walking once more the pilgrim way of Lent" (Hymn 149 - "Eternal Lord of love, behold your Church").

In the Ash Wednesday liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer – the liturgy which structures the season that it convenes – the worshipper is invited "to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word" (BCP, 265). This booklet was put together lovingly and faithfully by Betsy Tibbs to help us on our journey, particularly with "reading and meditating on God's Holy Word." We hope that time in this booklet will edify your souls as you take it up each day with your brothers and sisters at St. John in the Wilderness. I am grateful to each person who contributed to this project, especially to Betsy, and to those who reflects with us this Lent.

Beyond this booklet, I encourage you to prepare for Lent like you would any journey, but to do so prayerfully. Pause in silence to ask God for guidance in the days ahead. Read the itinerary given to us in the Ash Wednesday liturgy on pages 264-269 of the BCP. Make a list of what you will need on the pilgrim way. Write down what you are doing to simplify your life and create the space for encountering God. At a minimum, take up these words in your hands, read the Scriptures referenced, and join the Church catholic for a Lent filled with grace.

Your Fellow Pilgrim,

The Rev. Josh Stephens
Rector

Ash Wednesday Meditation by Earle Ross Haire, Jr.

Read: Matthew 6: 1-21

Humorists have tried to have the last word on Death. Mark Twain in his novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson* has the title character say,

“All say, ‘How hard it is we have to die’— a strange complaint to come from the mouths of people who have yet to live.”

When rumors floated that Twain had died, he told a young reporter,

“Tell them: The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.”

In his autobiography Twain wrote, ***“People ought to start out dead and then we’d be so much more honest— and so much earlier.”***

Oscar Wilde's wit touched upon death. When told of the cost of his medical bill, Wilde mused,

“Well, I shall have to die as I live— beyond my means.”

Woody Allen had much to say about his neurotic unease with death:

- ***“It is impossible to experience one’s own death objectively and still carry a tune.”***
- ***“Whosoever shall not fall by the sword or by famine shall fall by pestilence so why bother shaving?”***
- ***“I don’t want to achieve immortality through my art. I want to achieve it by not dying.”***
- ***“Non-Existence is okay. As long as you’re dressed for it.”***
- ***“I don’t mind dying; I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”***

Humor is a great defense against our fear of death. All of us are touched by the fear of dying. All of us have been wounded by the death of someone that we loved and love still.

Today, we sidestep the shield of humor to confront death. We begin the season of Lent with a painful dose of reality: death awaits us. Death is part of our life. Yet we try, to the fullest extent possible, to conceal this reality from our minds. Once a year the church comes along and says:

You will die and your body turn to dust. Each day of your life contains the mystery of death; each day we live a little, each day we die a little.

On this Wednesday, we Christians around the world face with as much honesty as we can muster the reality of death. If this is so, then this holy day demands we face our own death, but begs the question: what about the life I am now living? The words and actions of Ash Wednesday have real and lasting consequences. They unleash for us the power of *reconsideration*.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of a reconsideration of the deeper meaning of Life— a reconsideration of the meaning of Death— a reconsideration of both our life and death, apart from and in Christ Jesus. The church says to us today ***you are going to die to be sure. You can never do anything to change that. But you can die in Christ Jesus, whose death on a cross transforms our own death.***

Ashes are not placed on our forehead in a random pattern they are placed on our foreheads in the shape of a cross. The lives we live hold for each of us days of sorrow and days of joy. Yet our lives are not our own. Your life touches mine. My life touches yours. Our lives touch. Our lives are a gift. Our lives are precious in God's sight. There is new life pulsating just behind the veil of the life we now live, coursing behind the life we share — a life that gives to us a glimpse of Jesus every time we come together to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Our life of faith can conquer the paralyzing fear of death — fear that if we do not allow it to be swallowed up by the shadow of the cross shall rob us of the foretaste of eternal life that Christ offers daily. We may discover a new life within the very life we are living. May we find a life that will one day conquer death with eternal life. On Ash Wednesday we will together take our first steps toward Jerusalem. Let us die in Christ. Let us live in Christ. Let us begin.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

18 February 2021

Deuteronomy 30:15-29

Luke 9:18-25

The readings for the Thursday after Ash Wednesday all seem to provide me with direction and guidance for how I should live out my faith as a Christian.

The Collect offers direction for those who seek to enter the glory of God. Particularly meaningful to me is this passage: **"...that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life."** It is in these words that we are provided guidance for living as a follower of Christ.

The Old Testament lesson similarly provides a pathway for those seeking a closer relationship with God through these words: **"If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you."**

And in the New Testament lesson from Luke, Jesus offers counsel and guidance to his flock with these words: **"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it."**

For me, these passages provide direction for living as a disciple of Christ, a participant in the larger community of God's people, and a member of the worshipping family of St. John in the Wilderness.

John Barker

Friday after Ash Wednesday

19 February 2021

Isaiah 58:1-9a

Matthew 9:10-17

This reading resonated with me, considering all our country has recently gone through. Isaiah is speaking to the people of Jerusalem as they are struggling to rebuild their homeland after being in exile.

The prophet is requesting behaviors that seek to loosen the ways of injustice; to reconcile, and care for others; to share what we have; to cease blaming others and using evil speech; to stop feeling entitled and privileged.

By our relationship with God, He is asking us to seek guidance in bringing light and healing to our world, to share our bounty with others; to be ever watchful for injustices.

Let us strive to follow Isaiah's teachings.

Debby Staton

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

20 February 2021

Isaiah 58:9b-14

Luke 5:27-32

In early March 2020, I moved to Carolina Village, just days before the COVID-sky fell. Restrictions came out of nowhere; uncertainty and fear were in the air. Some folks felt I had made a mistake by moving at such a time, but I knew otherwise.

In truth, I felt guided and blessed to be in a protected community where my best interests were paramount. The timing was absolutely perfect. As Isaiah 58:11 proclaims:

“The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.”

By summer, I had a nice little garden in my new apartment courtyard, overlooking the water of a small pond. I have been transplanted, guided, and loved. What's not to like?

Thanks be to God!

Nancy Cooper

First Sunday of Lent

21 February 2021

Genesis 9:8-17 1 Peter 3:18-22

PRAYER OF SURRENDER

My God, I want to give myself to You. Give me the courage to do this. My spirit within me sighs after You. Strengthen my will. Take me. If I don't have the strength to give You everything, then draw me by the sweetness of Your love. Lord, who do I belong to, if not to You? What a horror to belong to myself and to my passions! Help me to find all my happiness in You, for there is no happiness outside of You.

Why am I afraid to break out of my chains? Do the things of this world mean more to me than You? Am I afraid to give myself to You? What a mistake! It is not even I who would give myself to You, but You who would give Yourself to me. Take my heart.

What joy it is to be with You, to be quiet so that I may hear Your voice! Feed me and teach me out of Your depths. Oh God, You only make me love You. Why should I fear to give You everything and draw close to You? To be left to this world is more frightening than this! Your mercy can overcome any obstacle. I am unworthy of You, but I can become a miracle of Your grace.

Francois Fenelon, French Archbishop (1651-1715)

Mike Covell

Monday in the First Week of Lent

22 February 2021

Leviticus 19:1-2,11-18

Matthew 25:31-46

The Gospel lesson usually speaks to me most clearly, but in today's selections I was drawn to the Leviticus excerpt. This portion of Leviticus expands on the Ten Commandments, providing more detail about how to lead the sort of moral life God commands.

Like many Christians, I've always been fairly confident about keeping the commandments. With the extra data provided in Leviticus, however, right actions are brought into sharper focus. And, while I truly can't see myself deliberately tripping a blind person, there are a couple of dictums where I'm definitely off the rails.

Verse 18 is particularly problematic for me right now. **"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."** With so many people dying and suffering as a result of Covid-19 amid an outrageously controversial and combative political year, I do bear a grudge. It's nestled next to my heart, along with my horror and sadness and fear.

This grudge is not against a single person; I'm angry and disappointed in quite a number of people in power who have done too little to assuage the suffering.

So now – after reading Leviticus – I need to do the hard work of forgiving. And it's going to take a long time. Today's prayer is so very, very appropriate to my needs.

"Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully increase in us your gifts of holy discipline, in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; that our lives may be directed to the fulfilling of your most gracious will..."

Janet Johnson

Tuesday in the First Week of Lent 23 February 2021

Isaiah 55:6-11

Matthew 6:7-15

In Matthew 9:13 Jesus taught his disciples how to pray. I am learning to pray as I walk with Him.

"I **greet** thee, who my sure Redeemer art,
my only **trust** and Saviour of my heart,
who **pain** didst undergo for my poor sake;
I pray thee, from our hearts all **cares** to take."

(from The Strasbourg Psalter, 1545; tr. Elizabeth L. Smith, 1817-1898)

Greet. Good morning, God, you are holy and a friend, a true friend who said in Deuteronomy 31:6, I will go with you and never leave you. Thank you for walking with me all the days of my life. Lord, help me choose to do your will.

Trust. Lord, I pray Proverbs 3:5-6 that I trust you with all my heart and that I will not rely on my own insight. I pray that in all my ways I will acknowledge you and you will make my paths straight. Lord, please grow my trust in you.

Pain. Thank you, Jesus, for enduring the pain on the cross for me. As Philippians 2:8 says, You humbled yourself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Please Lord, help me to be obedient.

Cares. Having stage 4 ovarian cancer for 11 years has brought pain, prayers, and trust to my life. When I was going into my first surgery, I told my two sons that I would be healed no matter what. I would be with Jesus in heaven or healed during my time on earth. Jesus says in I Peter 5:7 to cast all my anxieties on him because he cares for me. Lord, help me accept your care.

This season of Lent opens my eyes once again that God is in control and always has been. Please, Lord, grant us all perseverance and your everlasting joy.

Katherine Gee

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

24 February 2021

Jonah 3:1-10

Luke 11:29-32

During these turbulent and stressful times, I find that the season of Lent, especially this year, is when I need to reflect the most on God's many blessings! But I find myself asking, "Where is God in all this mess that we and our leaders have created and befallen upon our neighbors?" My heart and mind are full of hate, rage, and stress! I need to find the answer, and as I ponder that question, I believe the answer can be found in prayer. When Jesus Christ reflected on what was asked of him by his Father in preparation for His ultimate sacrifice, his Father told Him to take on the sin of the world in the forgiveness of our humanly sins! This is something that I need to seriously take into prayer with God's help and His blessings! The stress, the fear, the anger, the divisiveness, and the combativeness of this time can be lifted from us if we truly believe in God's blessings, His sacrifices, and His forgiveness! There is much to ponder these days, and there is much to ask of God through Jesus Christ and especially of myself! Most importantly, this is especially a time to ask for God's forgiveness and healing! So, this Lenten Season is truly a time for healing - in many ways!

Will Rodriquez

Thursday in the First Week of Lent

25 February 2021

Esther 14:1-6,12-14

Matthew 7:7-12

Lent is a solemn religious observance in the Christian liturgical calendar. The purpose is the preparation of the believer for Easter through prayer, doing penance, mortifying the flesh, repentance of sins, almsgiving, and self-denial. Most of this preparatory work needs strength to achieve even a semblance of the purpose as we all know who have “given up” something for Lent. Where do we get this strength if not through Jesus Christ? At no other time in our lives do we really acknowledge religion and its importance to us. How many people attend church on Easter only? It is that important to us. We take time to acknowledge that there is a God and what that God means to us. We “dress up” for that God and wear our finery with pride. We gather family around us and share a special meal. We give generously and we pray and sing our hearts out at the service we attend.

But what of the rest of the year? Do we love our neighbor as ourselves? Are we kind and giving to others less fortunate? The events of the past year say a resounding NO. The pandemic shows us that some people do not care for others because they refuse to wear a mask or stay a distance away or keep to themselves to protect those who are vulnerable. The hate in this country for those who are not of the same mind bears this out as threats of insurrection and death abound.

I used to be a person who believed that goodness abounded in this country but not anymore. I see a lot of evil and I am filled with dread for the people in this land and the generations to come. **Strengthen us, O Lord, by your grace, that in your might we may overcome all spiritual enemies, and with pure hearts serve you, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever. Amen.**

Carol Rector

Friday in the First Week of Lent

26 February 2021

Ezekiel 18:21-28

Psalms 130

Matthew 5:20-26

All three of today's readings address righteousness versus iniquity. The dictionary tells us that iniquity is "immoral or grossly unfair behavior." For most of us a more common term is sin.

Ezekiel tells us to be righteous and have no iniquities, and then we will live in the Lord. However, if we do sin, then all the righteousness we had built up earlier will be erased, and we will be judged only by our sins.

The Psalmist asks the obvious question: If the Lord makes notes of all who sin, who then could stand? Don't we all sin at one time or another, in some way or another? But then he goes on to say that with the Lord there is "plenteous redemption."

As we travel through Lent, it is important to remember that while we are all sinners, there is Jesus Christ who died for us to redeem us from our sins. Imagine not knowing this during Jesus' final weeks. Imagine how hopeless we would feel knowing that even though we have been righteous at times, God has been taking notes and knows about our sins and is displeased. For me, that would be a very uncomfortable feeling.

Thanks be to God that we know "the rest of the story" and look forward to a glorious Easter.

Betsy Tibbs

Saturday in the First Week of Lent

27 February 2021

Deuteronomy 26:16-19 Psalm 119:1-8 Matthew 5:43-48

The use of the word "peculiar" in the King James version of our first reading seemed, well, rather peculiar to me. We think of eccentricity, oddity, or downright strangeness when we say the word. But Moses, the writer of Deuteronomy, had other ideas, and the disparity of meaning drove this writer to dig a bit deeper. Granted, peculiar can mean odd or unusual. But I found it can also mean special and distinctive. And this also, the word as noun: "A parish or church exempt from the diocese in which it lies, through being subject to the jurisdiction of a monarch..." Other versions of the Bible translate peculiar to mean that we are the Lord's very own possession, by following Him and obeying his laws. All three readings today are reminding us of our Lord's commands and our vows as Christians. And their importance. Do we act as though we are exempt from the world because of our affiliation with Christ? *In* the world but not *of* the world? Do we pay attention to His voice instead focusing on the fractious din all around us? Is God's love obvious in all we do? Are we diligent in seeking out opportunities to reach out to strangers or even a neighbor with whom we have had a disagreement? These are all mandates of Christ, you know.

We are promised that if we obey God's law and follow Him wholeheartedly, He will bless us and protect us. He will set us above all nations. He has declared us as His own and He is ours. A peculiar people, indeed!

Patrice German

Second Sunday in Lent

28 February 2021

Genesis 17:1-7,15-16

Romans 4:14-25

I have always found it difficult to clearly separate hard work to acquire material things from the hard work that it takes to follow Jesus. One may produce temporary comfort here on earth, while the other provides salvation of your soul, that I understand. But why does one have to exclude the other? We are taught from childhood that hard work to provide for our family and other commitments is a virtue, and setting an example of work is positive for our society as a whole. This does not necessarily mean that hard work is the worship of wealth, but it is hard work that provides resources to support a family and to share with others in need. The two seem compatible to me, but they are always cast as evil versus good.

Ken Jones

Monday in the Second Week of Lent

March 2021

Daniel 9:3-10

Psalm 79:1-9

Luke 6:27-38

Let us remember in this season of Lent, no matter what challenges we are facing, God has us in His sights. The season of Lent is a season of awakening. It is also nature's season of awakening. Just as the birds begin to sing and the buds burst open, we open our hearts to be awakened as never before to His Power. Ponder that word for a moment, strong word, Power! Not earthly power but heavenly Power, His Power! The Power that gives love, peace, joy, patience. Each day we cry out, "Not anything of me, Lord, but only You through me. Exorcise me of my failings. Give me ears to hear with keener hearing, eyes to see with keener seeing, hands to serve with keener giving, a purer heart for You." May our reflection on His holy precepts lead us closer to Him.

As Richard of Chichester so succinctly stated,

"May I know you more CLEARLY,
Love you more DEARLY,
Follow you more NEARLY.

This is an awakened heart!

Shirley Crowson

Tuesday in the Second Week of Lent

2 March 2021

Isaiah 1:2-4,16-20 Psalm 50:7-15,22-24 Matthew 23:1-12

The readings for this day deal with rebellion and repentance. In the Isaiah reading, Israel has sinned by disobedience and is utterly estranged from God. But in verses 19 and 20 God says, **"If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land, but if you refuse and rebel you shall be devoured by the sword."**

How's that for a choice? In the passage from the Psalms, God says he doesn't want burnt offerings and sacrifices of animals; this does not please Him. What pleases God are thanksgiving and prayer. It is summed up in verses 22-23, **"Mark this then, you who forget God, or I will tear you apart, and there will be no one to deliver you. Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God."** We seem to have a choice; this is free will. We can repent from our sins or stay disobedient. In the Matthew passage Jesus is discussing the Scribes (lawyers) and Pharisees. He says they don't practice what they preach. They burden others but don't lift a finger to help remove the burden. Jesus is speaking here about the minute details of the Law that the Scribes and Pharisees said following were necessary to be saved.

Jesus said he is the one teacher and His father in heaven is the one Father. To me this brings us full circle to the Old Testament readings. We need to repent for our sins, give thanks to our Father in Heaven, and realize that through the power of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we are forgiven and made right with God.

O God, you willed to redeem us from all iniquity by your Son. Deliver us when we are tempted to regard sin without abhorrence, and let the virtue of his passion come between us and our mortal enemy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Jim Olson

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent 3 March 2021

Jeremiah 18:1-11,18-20 Psalm 31:9-16 Matthew 20:17-28

I feel like this scripture is very important, especially during such a time of division in our country. People are getting so wrapped up in their own opinions and views that they forget the truly important ideas of love. God never wanted us to fight over skin color, race, gender, or ways of love. **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Matthew 22:34-40. We need to set aside our differences and come together. Hate never solves problems but creates even deeper divides. “And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us. We close the divide because we know, to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside. We lay down our arms, so we can reach out our arms to one another.” These are the words of Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman, who read her poem ‘The Hill We Climb’ at Joe Biden’s Inauguration. I encourage you to listen to her poem if you haven’t already. I am asking all of you, never let hate get in the way of love, because in the end, it is hate that separates us and creates war, and it is love that God wants.

Julianna Savage

Age 14

Thursday in the Second Week of Lent

4 March 2021

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalm 1

Luke 16:19-31

As always, I am struck by the thread found in the lectionary readings from one Scripture to the next. Today's readings are brought together by almost the exact words being written in Jeremiah and the Psalms:

Jeremiah 17: 7-8

**"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.**

**⁸ He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit."**

and Psalm 1: 1-3

**Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.**

The context of both of these passages deals with choosing a path forward and shows the stark difference between a person who chooses to trust in the Lord versus the one who depends on his own strength to make his way. The theme is carried forward to the gospel reading where Jesus tells the story of the rich young man, who depended on his own strength and wealth and spent eternity in the flames of hell while Lazarus, who had been afflicted with sores for many years and depended upon the Lord for supplying his needs, spent eternity in the

presence of Abraham, thus in heaven. Jesus then uses this conversation with the rich young man to point to his resurrection and this truth: that the disbelief of those that won't listen to the teachings of Moses and the Prophets, most certainly won't be convinced to turn from their wicked ways even if someone "should rise from the dead" to tell them of their folly.

We see in these scriptures the importance of being grounded in every way in the Lord as we make choices each day of how to live. May we be mindful to always be turning our hearts to Jesus for that grounding in response to His great love for us.

Mary Ann Inglis

Friday in the Second Week of Lent

5 March 2021

Genesis 37:3-4,12-28 Psalm 105:12-22 Matthew 21:33-43

“Though evil men assail”

We read this morning, “The stone that the builders rejected,” and “they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.”

We understand the sentiment – tossed in a heap to be hauled away or covered by overgrown weeds. Words of disgust and anger thrown between gritted teeth.

And like children, we say in our hearts “But” I want to be thought well of; but I was only walking, I was coming to you; but I want you to love me.

Instead, there is a planning (a conspiracy) of evil and we are surprised. Joseph doing his father’s bidding, walking through a field; the son being sent out (again by his father) to check on the harvest. In both passages we are told, “they conspired against him,” and “come...let us kill him.”

The stories mirror one another. They cast a reflection on our own lives. We have been – maybe not killed – but slighted; looked the other way on; forgotten; spoken ill of; derided. We are not wanted.

We cry with the Psalmist our childlike prayers, “do not forget me, Lord”; “remember me for good, oh my God”; “let my cry come unto thee.”

In Matthew our story finishes with, “This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” This thrown-awayness, this tossed aside, it doesn’t feel marvelous. It is a severing of all we had hoped for in a relationship.

A whisper of hope lies like a seedling in the verses “until” and “marvelous.”

Maybe in the abyss God is still here; maybe in this unknown future God is still with me.

In this Lenten journey we remember our Lord walking toward Calvary, and we are comforted. Yes. Maybe, God. Maybe all will be made right. Our faith is thin.

But maybe.

Beth Miller

Saturday in the Second Week of Lent

6 March 2021

Micah 7:14-15,18-20 Psalm 103: 4(5-8)9-12 Luke 15:11-32

This Psalm shows the importance of God's forgiveness. His forgiveness is the key to our salvation, and when we have peace with the Lord, then we are able to better serve him and serve others the way He wants us to. I think God's forgiveness of our sins is definitely one of the most, if not the most, important part of our relationship with God. All humans are inclined to make mistakes, and knowing that even when we mess up, God will forgive us and save us is very comforting knowledge to have.

Laura Shelton

Age 15

Third Sunday in Lent

7 March 2021

Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Just over two weeks ago, we observed Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, the day we are traditionally marked with a cross of ashes on our foreheads and are reminded that we come from dust and will be returning to dust. Even after we wash those black marks from our faces, we can feel their weighty significance, feel the solemnity of the season. As we begin this third week of Lent, we might be longing for the end of the story we know so well, the one that makes us who we are. We want to peer into the empty tomb.

Instead, in the Exodus reading, we come face to face with rules, the Ten Commandments God gave, the "shalls" and "shall nots" that guide us into good relationship with God and with each other. All our lives, from the very beginning, we are surrounded by rules. They protect us, and they restrict us, like good fences. God knew that human beings need good fences.

But even before God gave the first rule, God spoke his credentials, the best reason to obey the rules: **"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."** The faithfulness and protection of God had already been proven. The Israelites had already been rescued from slavery, had been transported through the waters of the sea, had been given manna in the wilderness. God's love and power and provision came before the law.

On this Lenten journey, may we remember the rules, and may we remember that we have been rescued from the power of sin, nourished and blessed by the God who fences us, above all, with his love.

Deacon Joyce Beschta

Monday in the Third Week of Lent

8 March 2021

2 Kings 5:1-15b

Psalms 42:1-7

Romans 5:1-11

Luke 4:23-30d

In the Gospel of Luke, we find: **"There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." "When they heard this all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up and drove him out of town and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way."**

Today we would say, "no good deed goes unpunished." Sadly, those people had no idea that Jesus, the Son of God, was there with them doing good, and they could not accept the good that was done and that it was Jesus's choice to cure Naaman. So what did they do but just what we do today, lash out at what they did not understand. That did not stop Jesus from continuing his ministry. We must be intimidated by the naysayers. We must strive to help those in need rich or poor, the same as us or not.

From Romans: **" Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand." And not only that, knowing suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."**

Through faith in love of Jesus Christ, hence God, we can have peace in our lives. We see how Jesus endured derision, ridicule, and the cross, which in turn shows us how we can endure our earthly struggles, which then strengthens our character, which produces the hope necessary to continue in our daily lives and hope for eternity in God's presence.

Richard Zecher

Tuesday in the Third Week of Lent

9 March 2021

Daniel 3:25-27,34-43 Psalm 25-3-19 Matthew 18:21-35

"Tell me the stories of Jesus." Do you remember singing this song since childhood? From time to time I find myself singing or humming this familiar tune, and then the stories come to mind. One story I always favored and thought so amazing was the story of the three men: Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego being put into the furnace of fire! They were not afraid for they knew that their Lord would be with them.

When I feel unsure of how or what I should do, I remember this story and know that as long as I ask and lean on my Lord, my decision will be the best I can do with what I have to offer. Remember to be humble, and, "It is not about me but about being used by Jesus to act and show His love for all."

Linda Giltner

Wednesday in the Third Week of Lent 10 March 2021

Deuteronomy 4:1-2,5-9 Psalm 78:1-6 Matthew 5:17-19

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? Deuteronomy 4:7

When Moses said this, he was explaining to the Israelites how they were different from other people and how God wanted them to act in a manner that would set them apart from other people. Likewise, as Christians we are called to be different from the world. Being different in a Christ-like way seems pretty straightforward – do good; keep the Ten Commandments; help the poor, the sick, and the needy; love our neighbors, including our enemies, as ourselves.

We can do those things. We do do those things. But does that make us different in a noticeable way? Sometimes. The existence of phrases like “Christian charity” and “Christian love” indicate that doing good things and loving others is associated with being a Christian.

But is that enough? Does that set us apart from the world? Christians are not the only people who do good things and love other people. The world is certainly a better place because of the good works of people who practice many religions. For that matter, the world is a better place because of the good works of people who are atheists and agnostics.

What then set the Israelites apart from the world? What sets Christians apart from the world? What makes us different?

Moses told the Israelites that, unlike other peoples' gods, God was near to them when they prayed. God does not merely dictate from on high and seek our obedience and worship. Unlike other peoples' gods, God wants a relationship with us. He loves us. Instead of forcing himself on us, God gave us freewill. But for His grace, freewill would defeat our relationship with God. God sacrificed

his only son, Jesus. Jesus paid the price for our inevitable sins. Jesus is the light of the world. God gave us his Holy Spirit. By the grace and love of God, through Jesus and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can maintain our relationship with God by prayer. Prayer keeps the light of Christ in our hearts.

Our relationship with God is what sets us apart from the world. Our relationship with God nurtures our acts of goodwill and charity. Sometimes our relationship with God is the only thing that makes it possible for us to love our enemies. Likewise, our relationship with God is sometimes the only thing that keeps us safe, that heals us. Jesus has promised that God hears our prayers and grants our petitions. The faith and confident assurance only Christians can have that God is with us and the light of Christ which shines within us are what make us Christians and what set us apart from the world.

Susan Fretwell

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent

11 March 2021

Jeremiah 7:23-28

Psalms 95:6-11

Luke 11:14-23

Could anything be more relevant in the toxic political climate in which we find ourselves than the quote from Jesus in Luke 11:17, **“Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house.”**? Jesus is responding to accusations from some who said that he cast out demons by the power of Satan. If these accusers had been presented with irrefutable proof of his identity as the Son of God, would they have accepted even irrefutable proof? Were they so suspicious that *nothing* would make them believe? I'm that way sometimes, my mind already made up, too certain to change.

If I long to heal the division in our country and in the Kingdom of God, I, myself, am a good place to start. If I yearn to reconcile with those from whom I feel estranged, if I need to forgive wrongs I feel have been done, what action can I take today, what pause can I practice to help heal myself? What genuine kindness can I show as a result of opening my heart to being loved and forgiven myself? Can I believe that, just maybe, someone else's point of view might have merit? It's hard work, but God's Kingdom doesn't just magically appear. We have to love it into existence.

Leslie Stott

Friday in the Third Week of Lent

12 March 2012

Hosea 14:1-9

Psalms 81:8-14

Mark 12:28-34

Earthly evils and *earthly* goods. The adjective “earthly” sets it apart from other types of goods and evils. Earthly describes things of this world or human, as opposed to heavenly or spiritual. I would say earthly items do not last.

Evil is another word for wickedness. Earthly evils can be caused by people’s pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth. Each one of these is rooted in the human (earthly) desire for more. We pray that we know and trust that God will provide what we need and there is no reason to want excessive amounts of anything.

Fixing our heart on earthly things is like caring about an object. Once you get that thing, you will want something else, something more. You are not satisfied. They will always make more. In loving God with your whole heart, you will feel His love in return.

Danielle Pharr
Age 12

Saturday in the Third Week of Lent

13 March 2021

Hosea 6:1-6

Psalms 51:15-20

Luke 18:9-14

The prayer for the day identifies the continual dilemma in our spiritual life: First, that we are frail by nature (as a fundamental consequence of our sinfulness) and powerless to resist dangers on our own; and second, that God grants us strength when we ask. Here are the two sides of ourselves: the dark and the light.

As Hosea speaks in the Old Testament reading, he begins by inviting the Israelites to “return to the Lord” – from whom they’ve obviously strayed – and in so doing God will heal them, bind them up, revive them, and finally raise them up on the third day so that they may live in His presence. Forgetting the passage of time, “they” are us.

David's Psalm, having confessed transgression and sin in a previous passage, invites us to open our lips to praise God and turn to the Lord by offering our broken spirits.

Luke relates Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple. The former boasts his qualifications for God's favorable treatment, while the latter admits his sin and asks God to be merciful to him. Jesus clearly states it was the meek tax collector who “went down to his home justified rather than the other” and closes the parable with a variation on the first-shall-be-last/last-shall-be-first maxim by using “exalted” and “humbled.”

Hosea, the Psalmist, and Luke each illustrate our brokenness and separation from God, then buoy us up with the reminder that we can indeed be His children. The specific instructions for achieving this vary over the thousand years between the Psalm era and the New Testament, but we come away from the readings with the Good News that we are ultimately saved by our faith in Jesus Christ.

Chuck Johnson

Fourth Sunday in Lent

14 March 2021

Numbers 21:4-9

Psalms 107:1-3,17-22

John 3:14-21

As I read, it came very clear to me how blessed we are to have this legacy of Scripture and the stories told down through the ages.

John relates back to the time of Moses when the children of Israel were complaining in the desert. They were focusing on the negative things going on around them, rather than focusing on the good. They were in doubt of both God's wisdom and Moses' leadership. The people were sent a reminder (the snakes) that things can always be worse. But as he always does, God provided a better focus for them (the bronze serpent) and a means of salvation from certain death.

In his gospel, John admonishes that we as Christians are always to keep looking to Jesus, as the Israelites looked up to the bronze serpent. Not only that, but **"...so must the Son of Man be lifted up."** Now more than ever we need to lift up Christ to the world by exemplifying him in our actions, words, and deeds. With so many fear-filled things going on in our world today, we must reflect His love and grace to all who are in need of salvation.

The psalmist, King David, begins by praising and thanking the Lord. He says that the redeemed of the Lord should SAY SO; that those who have prayed for and felt God's mercy in their lives should rejoice and be glad. Our lives should be lived in gratitude to God. We must live a life that tells the good news of Christ.

Patrice German

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent

15 March 2021

Isaiah 65:17-25

Psalms 30:1-6,11-13

John 4:43-54

I was drawn to today's meditation by the simple eloquence of the prayer and yet its depth of meaning to me. I thank God for the gift of the Eucharist. Among the powerful blessings of receiving the Eucharist is my growing comfort and assurance in the "communion of saints." As I kneel to receive communion and reflect on the generations of souls who have knelt in this same place at SJW over the years, I feel the nurturing power of our church community as well as the presence of dear Christian friends and family who are no longer living this earthly life, but somehow continue to know, love, and support me. I have come to understand this "communion" includes not just the famous saints with a capital "S," but also everyday saints who encourage us along our earthly pilgrimages.

The scripture readings from Isaiah, Psalms, and the Gospel of John reflect the timeless struggle of God's people to find (in the words of today's prayer) **"that place of light where God dwells forever with his saints."** Over and over again, cries of distress, despair, defeat, and doubt are countered by celebration of joy, thanksgiving, victory, belief, and faith in God and his redemptive love. Isaiah's prophesy envisions **"new heavens and a new earth"** where **"no more shall the sound of weeping be heard . . . or the cry of distress."** The Psalm assures us **". . . His anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. . . Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning."** And in John's gospel, Jesus has compassion for the royal official humbly begging for his son's life. Jesus understood this desperate father's need to see a sign of God's power in order to believe and healed his son. Imagine the joy and thanksgiving in that household!

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (John 1:5).

Marie Hyder

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

16 March 2012

Ezekiel 47:1-9,12

Psalms 46:1-8

John 5:1-18

In 2021, we hope the New Year brings peace and healing. The challenge continues, as these readings reinforce. Water and light are vital to life. After all, water played an essential role in Jesus' healing of the sick who were **"waiting for the moving of the water"** (John 5:3). Jesus also healed the sick as **"a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God"** (Psalm 46:4). But troubled water is reflected also. Ezekiel 47:8-9 reveals how fresh running river water gave life to all as it entered the salty sea, where it could not have sustained life previously. Are we looking at good versus evil? Fresh water keeps us alive, but water can be deadly when it is not.

During this time of Lent, remember to explore both sides of what confronts us. Strive for goodness. Jesus knew his time on earth would soon end, but through his holiness the outcome would benefit all of us. It's up to us to turn it around, whatever we encounter. Even in our darkest hour, Life is living water and light prevails.

Joey Popp

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

17 March 2012

Isaiah 49:8-15

Psalm 145:8-19

John 5:19-29

“The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.”

Psalm 145:18

Our lives are filled with so many choices and decisions. In our everyday lives we have to work at being a good Christian. We depend on daily prayer that God will help us through the day. If we only ask, He is there to help us make the right decisions. We are truly blessed to live in the great Blue Ridge where we have such beautiful mountains. We can literally “lift our eyes unto the hills”, from where our strength comes. Yes, a walk in the woods or around a lake gives me peace. He is near, we need to be still and listen.

Eleanor Simons Flowers

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

18 March 2021

Exodus 32:7-14

Psalms 106:6-7,19-23

John 5:30-47

God's love grants us the ability to be free. Not only physically but mentally. People get so caught up with what the world convinces us is freedom that they lose touch of what God intended us to be. The only way you can be truly free is when you put your whole trust in God. He has the ability to cleanse us of all weakness, but in order for him to do so, we have to put all our faith in Him and not objects or society's standards.

Mary Shelton

Age 14

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent

19 March 2021

Wisdom 2:1a,12-24 Psalm 34:15-22 John 7:1-2,10,25-30

A month or two into the pandemic, my sister told me there was a polling organization in Texas that kept track of what time folks under lockdown decided to have a drink. That is: when did they shut their remote-work laptops, give up on home schooling, and announce cocktail hour? It was no surprise to learn that the martini shaker began appearing earlier and earlier in the day. Being cut off from social contact isn't good for people. It drives them do things that don't promote well-being. And, living in an enforced state of solitude is especially isolating for those enduring what the Book of Common Prayer calls "trouble, sorrow, or any other adversity."

As I read today's lessons, I found myself thinking of how abnormally alone many of us have been over the past year. All three passages foreshadow the suffering Jesus will soon experience. The words from Wisdom seem almost mocking: **"Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions."** In the reading from John, the people of Jerusalem busily deny that Jesus is the Messiah: **"Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from."** Here I must note that a very dear friend has just received a cancer diagnosis, one with a devastating prognosis. Because of the pandemic, she lacks the in-person support of family and friends she needs. For her, these readings don't seem to offer comfortable words.

Yet – there is hope here, voiced by the Psalmist: **"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and will save those whose spirits are crushed."** In other words, we're not alone. Jesus went through his trials and crucifixion alone, bereft of his apostles; but he has never abandoned us. He is near to the brokenhearted, and to all of us, even as we social distance. As the season nears Easter, as I seek to do what I can for my friend, these are words I will hold in my heart.

Polly Morrice

Saturday in the Fourth Week of Lent

20 March 2021

Jeremiah 11:18-20

Psalms 7:6-11

John 7:37-52

Mercifully hear our prayers, O Lord, and spare all those who confess their sins to you; that those whose consciences are accused by sin may be your merciful pardon be absolved; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

I remember reading a story about a man who was at death's door. Several family members were sitting with him when he spoke with regret about a broken window. When they questioned him, they learned he had been a child of about ten when this even took place. Perhaps the younger family members found it incredible that he would be talking about this now, but it turns out he had never owned up to causing the damage, and it had weighed heavy on his heart his entire life.

We have all had situations in our lives where we have committed acts that we are not proud of and have hurt others. How wonderful that our confessions to God can wipe away our transgressions, even when we find it hard to forgive ourselves. As we recite the Lord's Prayer, we ask "and forgive our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." We ask that the wrongs we have done to others or those that have been done to us be forgiven. Each time we recite this beautiful prayer, we are reminded of God's abiding love and redemption.

Elisabeth Christenbury

Fifth Sunday in Lent

21 March 2021

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 51:1-13

John 12:20-33

Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. Psalm 51:5

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

These two verses spoke to me. Lent is a time of reflection and forgiveness. In verse 5, he is reflecting on what he was born into, and in verse 10, he is asking God to forgive him; he is asking God to give him a clean heart and a new spirit. This may have been thousands of years ago, but we can still relate to it. We often reflect on our choices and ask for forgiveness. For example, if we lose our temper towards someone we love and we may say things that are not necessary for the situation, they might hurt the person, so we reflect back on the fight or argument and later on ask for forgiveness upon our sins. Our sins may get worse as we age or not, but God will always be here to forgive us. He will be here to listen to us through our struggles. For someone who has been through tough stuff at a very young age, I sure know that God has helped me work through it.

Abigail M Stephens
Age 13

Monday in the Fifth Week of Lent

22 March 2012

Daniel 13

Psalms 23

John 8:1-11

One of the suggested readings for today is Psalm 23, The Twenty-Third Psalm, as most of us know it.

Growing up with an Episcopal Rector as a father, I was introduced to these biblical verses at an early age. And I believe “back in the day” we even recited it more than once in public school. So, for most of us it is one of the most popular and best known of all biblical writings. To this day we often hear it at funerals, weddings, and other spiritual occasions.

These words from David have surely passed the test of time. Through good times and most especially trying times, these words have brought comfort and solace to millions of people. Over this past year or more our country and our world have experienced a medical, social, and economic challenge the likes of which none of us could ever have imagined.

But if we believe in the strength and goodness of our God, we are comforted knowing that, **“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil: for you are with me, your rod and your staff—they comfort me.”** **“...and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Keep the faith. Praise be to God.

John Knapp

Tuesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

23 March 2021

Numbers 21:4-9

Psalms 102:15-22

John 8:21-30

The Bronze Serpent

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." 6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze^[a] serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

We have no idea how difficult this journey was, although it certainly seems overwhelmingly arduous. Many of the most faithful will not survive it—could we? Believing a mere set of promises of things to come. For forty years? It reinforces my belief that God cannot control all the circumstances of our earthly lives, but he does equip us with the means to handle them. Just believe (look upon the serpent). When we believe, we are healed—that's the gift he gives us.

Candace Lewis

Wednesday in the Fifth Week of Lent

24 March 2021

Daniel 3:14-20,24-28

Canticle 2 or 13

John 8:31-42

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, renew in us the gifts of your mercy; increase our faith, strengthen our hope, enlighten our understanding, widen our charity, and make us ready to serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reflections on a Prayer

As humans, we are ever in need of **renewal**--whether through sleep at the end of the day, nourishment after fasting, or God's **mercy** when we fail or become discouraged. **Mercy** means compassion or forbearance; it is the suspension of judgement extended to those who have offended. God's mercy is indeed a gift, but it is our recognition of this gift that enables us to pursue faith, hope and understanding.

Faith is what we rely on when we lack tangible evidence. Daniel recounts an improbable tale of faith so strong and steadfast that it spared the lives of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego who remained untouched by the fire pit into which King Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown. Their survival was evidence to the community that their God was indeed the true God.

Hope is aspirational and means being positive about the future in spite of the many life events that beat us down day to day. **Understanding** is how we make sense of the world. I believe it is pivotal in our relationship with God and that we understand with both our heart and our mind. Understanding is what makes it possible for us to respond to God fully and freely. It transforms blind obedience into action of our own free will.

We respond to the gifts God has graciously bestowed upon us through **charity** and **service** to our fellow humans. And we ask God to expand our charity and make us more generous with our time, talents, and resources.

Susan MacDonald

Thursday in the Fifth Week of Lent

25 March 2021

Genesis 17:1-8

Psalms 144

John 8:51-59

**3 O Lord, what are we that you should care for us? *
mere mortals that you should think of us?**

**4 We are like a puff of wind; *
our days are like a passing shadow.**

**5 Bow your heavens, O Lord, and come down; *
touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.**

**6 Hurl the lightning and scatter them; *
shoot out your arrows and rout them.**

When I started writing this meditation and read these four verses, I thought that when we pray, sometimes it's like we have a split personality. The psalmist certainly seems to. Verses 3 and 4 of the Psalm are among the most humble words in the Bible. With his next breath, however, he changes his attitude. It's as if he starts out saying, "O Lord, I am not worthy of your notice, much less, your loving care! But, since you *have* noticed, come down from heaven, hurl your lightning, and rout my enemies!" Not even a "Please, Lord." Almost like a command to God. I was embarrassed that I have done almost the same thing. I start out humble; then I request a miracle that *I* think would be a good thing. I know I am supposed to say, "Not my will but thine," but frequently I don't.

Then I noticed the Gospel for the day. Jesus and his disciples arrive in Bethany after their friend Lazarus is dead, despite Mary and Martha having sent an urgent message to them. Mary *humbly* falls to her knees at Jesus' feet. Then she actually fusses at him, "**Lord, if you had gotten here sooner, he wouldn't have died!**" Jesus raises Lazarus from the tomb anyway. Maybe having the faith to expect a miracle isn't so bad, even when we don't ask politely.

Marion Mitchell

Friday in the Fifth Week of Lent

26 March 2021

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Psalm 18:1-7

John 10:31-42

***“The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings”
Psalm 145: 17***

The two most important words in this statement are: just and kind.

Justice means different things to different people. When we are really trying to be just, most often our sincerity comes through, and those who we are trying to help feel our intention. Sometimes they do not see us as just, but we have to try, and we must continue to be just in our daily life. When we make justice a part of our lives, we will be more successful when we try to share it with others.

Kindness is often easier to show than is Justice. When we are really trying to be kind, it is more easily seen and appreciated if it is sincerely meant. Our very countenance can show that we are trying, if it is sincerely meant, you will more often be successful. Kindness is sometimes misunderstood, but more often it is seen and appreciated.

Neither Justice nor Kindness is a 'some-time' thing. We must make it a part of our daily lives.

John Baxton Flowers III

Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent

27 March 2021

Ezekiel 37:21-28

Psalms 85:1-7

John 11:45-53

As a young mother with slow moving triplets (three in four years) and a five-year delayed afterthought, every day was Lent. Naps, reading books, gourmet dinners, or time to myself were all given up for children. Dark chocolate, one piece a day, was my only vice. Some days that small piece of chocolate was the one thing that kept me going. There was a lot of praying in those forty days of abstinence.

When Jesus said, **"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you,"** (Ezekiel 36:26) perhaps he was encouraging us to use our hearts to serve others. What if this Lent, instead of fasting or giving something up, we give something of ourselves away? This past year, Americans faced more devastation than in decades. How can we reach out? This in itself will require some sort of sacrifice – mainly our time – but in blessing others, we will know the power of love. **"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...and thy neighbor as thyself."** Luke 10:27

Until you have learned the value of compassionately sharing other's misfortune, you cannot know real happiness. This Lent, ask God to sensitize your heart to the needs of others. Matthew 23:12 says, **"He that shall humble himself shall be exalted."** Jesus voluntarily laid down his life for all of us. That's what the cross is all about. It was the greatest act of humility in the history of our universe.

This Lent, pray that God will put someone in need on your heart and reflect on those whom you can give light to in these times of darkness. The light of Easter is shining. **"If a person isn't loving and kind, it shows that he doesn't know God – for God is love."** 1 John 4:8

Missy Schenck

Palm Sunday

28 March 2021

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Mark 14:1-15:47

Fast from criticism, and feast on **PRAISE**

Fast from resentment, and feast on **CONTENTMENT**

Fast from ill temper, and feast on **PEACE**

Fast from Jealousy, and feast on **LOVE**

Fast from pride, and feast on **HUMILITY**

Fast from selfishness, and feast on **SERVICE**

Fast from fear, and feast on **FAITH**

G. Raymond Kemp, Episcopal Priest (deceased)

The late Rev Kemp was a friend of Eleanor and John
Flowers

Monday in Holy Week

29 March 2021

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalms 36:5-11

John 12:1-11

John's account of a woman anointing the head of Jesus with expensive fragrant oils is similar to the ones in Matthew and Mark, whilst the one in Luke is different.

Three were concerned by the expense of the oil and Luke by the woman's sinful life.

Even hundreds of years later, among groups of people you will always have some who will have a difference of opinion on the same event.

"Continue your love to those who know you, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away."

Cathryn Harrell

Tuesday in Holy Week

30 March 2021

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalms 71: 1-14

John 12:20-36

Psalm 71:3 "Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe; you are my crag and my stronghold."

I have always liked reading the Psalms. Many are uplifting, while some are downright depressing! However, this Psalm has several verses that are close to my heart.

During this last year I have particularly relied on "my strong rock" to help me deal with all that has been going on in our world. The pandemic and accompanying lockdown were hard for all of us. I'm generally not very good at being a "homebody." However, with God's help, I have survived this crisis so far; and, with His help, I will continue to do so.

When my husband's health took its final downturn last summer, I found myself unable to visit him (pandemic again). I fretted and stewed over my helplessness. But "my strong rock" came to my rescue. I may have been helpless in terms of being with him, but God was not helpless, and I realized that His care for him would be just perfect. A weight lifted off my shoulders as I turned his final care over to the Lord. I was fortunate to be with him during his last few days at Elizabeth House. I hope I will be able to go as peacefully as he did.

Another verse I am feeling especially close to lately, is verse 9: ***"Do not cast me off in my old age; forsake me not when my strength fails."*** I'm not admitting to being "old" yet, but like many of us, I realize I'm not 18 anymore, and going to bed early is becoming more common in my daily life. But I am confident in the Lord not forsaking me, (even as my doctor says) "as we get older."

Betsy Tibbs

Wednesday in Holy Week

31 March 2021

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 70

John 13:21-32

In John we hear Jesus tell his disciples that one of them is going to betray him. Imagine sitting with Jesus and hearing this astounding and puzzling news. One of them gathers the courage to ask, "Who is it, Lord?".

But Jesus does not answer the question directly. He picks up a piece of bread and tells them that after he dips the bread in the dish, he will give it to that person. And so he does. He dips the bread and hands the piece of bread to Judas, and as Satan enters Judas, Jesus tells him to do what he has to do and do it quickly. Judas then leaves the group and goes out into the night.

The other disciples do not understand what has happened. Judas carries the purse, so maybe Jesus has told him, in some secret code, to go buy more food. Or maybe he is to go give to the poor. They are not worried. They know Judas and Jesus and figure there is something going on with the money. It doesn't concern them, so they ignore it.

Poor Judas. He has been given the worst task imaginable, and he carries it out to the letter.

We are all given difficult tasks in our lives, but nothing even comes close to Judas' task. No matter what task God gives me, I will do my best. Just as Judas did.

Betsy Tibbs

Maundy Thursday

1 April 2021

Exodus 12:1-4,(5-10),11-14

Psalms 116:10-17

John 13:1-17,31b-35

Let's imagine ourselves as one of the disciples knowing only what has happened so far in Jesus's story. He talks about some wonderful, yet strange things. At the same time, we do not know what the end is. We are not prepared for the events that happen on this day.

Jesus, the Messiah, washed our feet before the Passover meal. Of all people, that is not for him to do. What is the meaning of this? While his hands felt so comfortable, we were uncomfortable at the same time. Why? What is he is trying to teach us? He certainly loves each of us beyond what we can fathom.

At the meal, he takes a loaf of bread, gives thanks, and now this bread becomes so much more when he says "This is my Body, which was given for you. Eat this in remembrance of me." He then takes a cup of wine, gives thanks and says, "Drink this. This is my Blood for the new Covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." How can the bread and wine be Jesus' body and blood?

After supper, we followed Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Of all times, we fell asleep while he prayed. Suddenly, Roman soldiers appeared. Judas Iscariot, one of us, betrayed Jesus to them with a kiss. They took Jesus away. Why would Judas do it? The events are happening so fast.

We all scattered and hid. We are afraid.

With all that we have seen while being with Jesus, none of this makes sense. What is happening? Is there meaning to it all? Is it all over? Perhaps all we would be able to do is to pray: Please Lord, help me to understand.

Meditate on the questions above.

Deacon Sandy Rex

Good Friday

2 April 2021

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 22

John 18:1-19:42

Could you have Easter without Good Friday?

If we were to answer that question by statistically looking at church attendance on Good Friday as compared to Easter Sunday, then American Christians overwhelmingly believe that you can, in fact, have Easter without Good Friday. While pew availability on Good Friday may be plentiful and Easter seats are hard to come by, I do not see how it is possible. And I wonder what it says about us that we are motivated and excited to come when the lilies are in bloom, the trumpets are sounding, and the colors are bright, but not when violence is in the air and the silence of death settles over us.

At a very deep level we are terrified of death and of dying. It scares us that we will die and that our loved ones will die also. The process of dying, which we are engaged in right now, is not something we like to think about. We increasingly believe that suffering is bad for us and must be avoided at all costs. And we are not sure what to do with the forces of death that exist in our world -- forces that confuse and hurt us that we share in through ignorance, greed, envy, and even manipulation. Yes, death and dying terrify us, and that is why we need Good Friday.

Good Friday is a hard service to attend. This is a hard day to "celebrate." Our liturgy, Scriptures, and prayers bring us face to face with death today through the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Death is unavoidable today because God's Son enters into it willingly and lovingly. In so doing, Jesus, firstly, unmask the evil powers of death that claw at our world, our bodies, and souls. Then, secondly, he takes on those forces of death -- even death itself -- into his very person. It's hard to watch because we love him and he loves us so. It is hard to watch because it shows us things about us and our world that terrify us. And yet it is for us. It is all for us. There is no going around the cross this

time. This is a Good thing because there is no resurrection for Christ or for us without dying, without death.

The Rev. Josh Stephens
Rector

Holy Saturday

3 April 2021

Job 14:1-14

Psalm 31:1-4,15-16

Matthew 27:57-66

As on Thursday, let's imagine ourselves as one of the disciples knowing only what has happened so far in Jesus's story. We do not know what the end is. We are not prepared for the events that happened the day before.

Yesterday, they put our Jesus on a cross. They crucified him. He died, but he was the Son of God. He was our Lord, but why did he say from the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus healed the sick. He raised the dead. We saw him walk on water. He taught us about a new life. He said things would be new. He told us that he was the Son of Man and that he is the Son of God the Father. He told us that we could have new life through him.

But now he is gone. Without him we have no hope.

With what we have seen, what we have heard, what we have experienced, can there be life without our Jesus?

All I want to do is to pray, to cry. Oh God, there must be more. Save us, please. . .

I will remember what he did. I will pray as Jesus taught us. I will wait, and I will **hope**.

Meditate on what life would be without Jesus Christ.

Deacon Sandy Rex

Easter Sunday

4 April 2021

Acts 10:34-43

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

John 20:1-18

Happy Easter! Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Please turn in your Bible to John 20:1-18 or search online for John 20:1-18 NRSV and read.

"If Jesus is alive, everything changes. It is no longer a matter of questioning the historical record but a matter of being put into question by one who has broken every rule of ordinary human existence" (Luke Timothy Johnson, *Living Jesus*, 2000).

On this Easter Sunday, we encounter the one who was killed by our sin and shame, by our violence and ignorance -- we encounter him alive and filled with love and peace as never before. Now is not the time to question what happened or how it happened. Now is the time to look at the face of the risen Christ, to see his wounds, to hear his voice, to eat with him and of him. He is risen! Christ is risen! When he broke forth from the death of the tomb, he brought all creation with him. His resurrection -- his being alive -- puts us into question and invites us out of our ordinary human existence to what we were intended to be all along.

Seek out the risen Christ today. Encounter him alive and be set free.

The Rev. Josh Stephens
Rector