



Lenten Reflections

St. John's Lenten 2025 Devotional

40 Days + 6 Sundays + Easter!

(This devotion will also be sent out via email blast)

We hope that you'll find these 47 devotions as meaningful as we did in writing them. Writing these devotions was a great exercise, especially for those of us that have never written a devotion. This is also an opportunity to be part of a congregation-wide journey through Lent.

This year marks the 31th anniversary since the first edition of a St. John's Lenten Devotion, started by that year's vicar, Margay Whitlock! And it marks the 8th straight year since we resurrected this intergenerational project. It also includes devotions and greetings from around the US; St. John's alumni, former interns and former pastors! Greetings from Texas, Tennessee, Iowa, Georgia, Delaware, North Carolina, Arizona, Michigan and Florida!

About the devotions, the authors were asked to reflect on a short passage from the lectionary for that day. The devotions are short, usually 1 page, including a short passage the author chose.

These three websites have been recommended should you want to continue devotional readings throughout the year:

God Pause from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN

<https://www.luthersem.edu/godpause/>

Our Daily Bread

<https://odb.org/>

Encouragement for Today (for Women)

<https://proverbs31.org/read/devotions>

Please let us know if you would like to participate next year, and we can add you to our list of Devotional Writers!

John Dux and Jonathan Leigh

2025 Lenten Schedule

Ash Wednesday, Mar 5

- 12pm & 7:30pm Worship

Soup Suppers & Lenten Service

- Five Wednesdays: Mar 12 - Apr 9
 - 6pm Soup Supper
 - 7pm Lenten Service

Bible Study – ELCA World Hunger Lenten Study.

- In Person: Wednesdays 12pm: Mar 12, 19, 26 Apr 2, 9
- Or Zoom: Thursdays 6:30pm: Mar 13, 20, 27 Apr 3, 10

Holy Week Schedule:

* Service is live-streamed

Palm Sunday Worship Services, April 13

- 9 am Fellowship Hall
- 10:30 am Nave*

Maundy Thursday Worship Services, April 17

- 12 pm Nave*

Meal in the Upper Room, April 17

- 6 pm - Please sign up

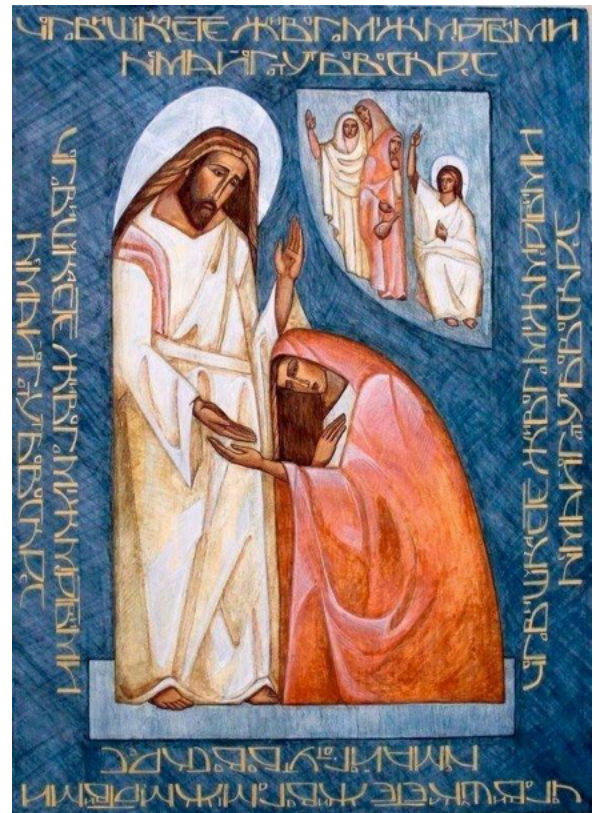
Good Friday Worship Services, April 18

- 12 pm Nave* Veneration of the Cross
- 8 pm Nave* Tenebrae

Easter Sunday Worship Services, April 20 - March 31

- 9 am Fellowship Hall
- 10:30 am Nave*

- Egg Hunt for the kids up to 5th grade immediately following the 10:30 am worship service (Courtyard)



‘Weep Not For Me, O Mother‘

Ukrainian Icon artist Ivanka Demchuk was born and lives in Lviv, Ukraine. She says -

“Icon can and should develop, change, embody the best aesthetic achievements of its time, then it becomes closer to the perception of a modern person, interests it. At the same time, as a sacred work, it should preserve spirituality in each new appearance.”

A word from our pastor...

One of the things I love about Scripture is its amazing resiliency and flexibility! Back in seminary, one of my professors remarked about the living aspect of Scripture by noting that for every experience you have in life, there is an account somewhere in the Bible that will relate; likewise, for every account in Scripture, you can probably find a moment in your own life that relates to that character's experience. Try it; it's really true! In fact, you can even read the exact same verse at two entirely different times in your life, and that verse may very well strike you in entirely two different ways.

In the pages that follow, you will find real living experiences written by your contemporaries—your friends, family, fellow members, or even strangers. (But they won't be strangers for long, right? Now that you've shared a truly meaningful moment with them in their devotional article!)

So, dive right in and treasure the way Scriptures permeate, teach, and influence each writer—and you.

What a gift this devotional booklet is to St. John's, and all the friends to whom you offer it. May all of you find new light and new ideas and new faith and new encouragement and new joy as you walk through Lent together with God and your family here at St. John's!

—Pastor Koenig



*The Stain Glass windows few of us usually see:
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
The windows are behind the pulpit.*

March 5 - Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 Psalm 51:1-17 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10 Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21



The seasons of the church year give our lives texture and focus, especially during these holy times of Lent. A time for spiritual focus and renewal, Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. The ashes we receive on our foreheads serve as a powerful Biblical symbol of repentance and remorse. Our pretensions are stripped bare, we hear the sobering words that deepen our sense of mortality: “remember you are dust and to dust you will return”.

Today’s reading from Matthew 6 features a passage from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. In this section, he talks about piety: how we pray, fast and give...all longtime hallmarks of this season. The logic and connections of the passage isn’t readily apparent. Jesus talks about our faith in action: “when you fast...” , “when you pray...” and “when you give alms...” . For those who are fasting or “giving up” something for the season, the thinking goes, you deprive yourself of something, such as food. When suffering the pangs of hunger, the person prays for strength from God. Finally, with the money saved from fasting/giving up a given thing (be it lunch, or going out to eat, or going to Starbucks) would go to the poor. Jesus emphasizes that the goal isn’t to glorify one’s self or one’s suffering, but to deepen one’s relationship with God.

As you embark upon this sacred time, God invites you to turn away from your selfish and indulgent desires, recognizing your time on this earth is finite, and turn to Christ, who readily receives you and brings you his life-changing, soul-cleansing grace. My prayer for you is that this Lent will be a time of reflection, renewal and spiritual growth.

Pastor Jason Talsness

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness: through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen

Collect for Ash Wednesday from The Service Book and Hymnal, published in 1958 by Lutheran Church in America (aka: “The Red Book”)

Pastor Jason Talsness currently serves Messiah Lutheran Church on Skidaway Island in Savannah, Ga. He was our vicar in 1995-96. He was delighted that his middle daughter Ana lived in the Hudson River valley having attended Bard College. He always looks forward to his annual Mission trip to Guatemala with the *Faith In Practice* Medical team.



March 6 – 2nd day of Lent

Exodus 5:10-23 Acts 7:30-34 Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Jeremiah 1: *The word of the Lord came to me saying: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say I am only a boy for you shall go to all to whom I send you!”*

Luke 13:34. *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.”*

Psalm 22:1-2a *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me?*

I’ve always questioned. In the dark ages as a confirmation student, I questioned the creation story and wanted to know where the dinosaurs fit in. I thought Eve got a raw deal and I said it!

At school I silently questioned friends who moaned at the pain of “giving up” chocolate or chewing gum for Lent. I never said it aloud because I needed their friendship, but I questioned how their “sacrifices” showed love for Jesus who gave his life for us. As I began seminary in a church that still wasn’t ordaining women my questioning started to find answers. The prophet Jeremiah was challenging and inspirational. He couldn’t hide behind his status as a boy to avoid obeying God’s call. He couldn’t hide behind a normal desire to be liked by his friends to avoid speaking God’s word. He gave his life to God. It cost him everything he held dear.

Jesus, knowing what lay ahead, wept over Jerusalem. Comparing himself to a mother hen, he lamented that his ministry of mercy and love was not heard by the people. Thus, he had to endure death on the cross. His dying cry echoed Psalm 22. “My God! Why have you forsaken me!” (Similarly in deep rage, Jeremiah cried to God as he lost family and friends in order to be true to God.)

In today’s church we are encouraged to “take on” something for Christ rather than give something up. Bishop Maryann Budde took on her confirmation and ordination vows to speak about *Christ’s call to be merciful*. It has cost her dearly, but it has not shaken her trust in our Savior who still wants to unite us under those divine wings.



Our world is challenged with the same injustices that Jeremiah and Jesus faced and I’m questioning again. Do I speak? To whom do I speak? Will there be a price? Am I willing to pay the price? How can I not speak for my Lord who gave His life for me?

Pastor Lyn Mehl, retired, member of St. John’s

March 7 – 3rd day of Lent

Exodus 6:1-13

Acts 7:35-42

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country.”



*The Plagues of Egypt from a Set of Windows Depicting the Exodus
Church of the Blessed Sacrament, Gorseinon, Swansea, Wales
by Paul Quail about 1984*

In Exodus 6, the passage tells us that God empowered Moses and Aaron to speak to Pharaoh about letting the Jews leave Egypt. In Acts the power that God gave Moses is reviewed.

This says to me that God will give us the powers that we need to accomplish what God wants us to do. We just have to be faithful to Him, and obey what rules He has given us, not to go against God and create false gods as the Israelites did or disobey the Ten Commandments.

In Psalm 91 It tells us that God is our Fortress and our strength. He will give us life long and full, and will always protect those who cling to him. We can always trust in God, our Creator!

Jan Viola

Martin Luther's Morning Prayer:

In the morning when you get up, make the sign of the holy cross and say:

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may also say this little prayer:

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Commandments, or whatever your devotion may suggest.

March 8— 4th day of Lent

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 John 12:27-36 Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16



It seems that “time” is an omnipresent part of our everyday life. One headline recently printed: “Time is a hidden currency of incalculable worth.” As we read in the Ecclesiastes text, there is a “time” for everything, but often we can figure that out only after the fact! The John text reminds us that we need to take care of urgent needs while it is light...so the “time” would be during the daytime...?

Whatever our needs may be, Psalm 91 suggests that whatever we need, God is ever present to give us refuge and shelter. We need to trust the Almighty to give us that sense of safety. As we read on in that chapter, we are given the assurance that “because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you.”

But then there is the grim reality that the devil keeps getting in the way of God’s will being done, and too often “bad things happen to good people.” We then pray: “...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil....” Our blessed assurance is John 12:26: “while you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become the children of light.”

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, We are eternally grateful for your awesome Grace, Love, and forgiveness. Keep us safe in your loving arms! Amen

Mary Heller (Senior!)

March 9 - 1st Sunday of Lent

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

Read Luke 4:1-13, "The Testing of Jesus"



Christ in the Desert

by Russian artist Ivan Kramskoi 1872

Spending forty days in the wilderness without food we easily see how Jesus was facing hard times and suffering. We further understand that during such times we can be tempted to break the rules to alleviate the suffering.

I have not faced significant hard times like Jesus' forty days of fasting. Similarly, the devil has not offered the power to rule over the world nor encouraged me to jump from a steeple. But in relatively easy times I have faced temptation and have often failed the test. The devil has tempted me to rule over smaller groups of people to get what I want and to do foolish things, e.g. reckless driving to save time.

Many times I feel "I can resist anything except temptation.", per a quote by Oscar Wilde.

Jesus faced temptation so he knows what it feels like to us. He resisted the temptation thus did not feel the fleeting reward of giving-in to it and the subsequent guilt of doing so. Nonetheless, he gave himself up to take the punishment (i.e. just reward) for our giving-in. He did so in order to have a relationship with us, one that does not hide or ignore the failings but recognizes them and helps us resist them the next time. He wants us to do that with each other as we all trespass against others and are trespassed against. This humbleness is essential to pure love from God.

Steve Jones

A prayer from our St. John's hymnal for Ash Wednesday:

Merciful God, accompany our journey through these forty days. Renew us in the gift of baptism, that we may provide for those who are poor, pray for those in need, fast from self-indulgence, and above all that we may find our treasure in the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

March 10 – 5th day of Lent

1 Chronicles 21:1-17 1 John 2:1-6 Psalm 17

The Old Testament reading for today, 2 Chronicles 21:1-17, takes place during the “golden era” of Israel’s history when King David was on the throne.

David ordered his “sidekick” Joab to take a census of all the people in the land. Sounds like a reasonable thing to do, right? But the opening sentence of the chapter says, “Satan rose up against Israel and caused David to take a census of the Israelites.” So it was Satan’s idea!

Why would Satan care about Israel taking a census? Well, because God did not order it, and because Satan was appealing to David’s pride in Israel having grown into a large and mighty force with whom other nations had to reckon and to David’s growing dependence on military strength instead of dependence on God. And David fell for it!



Joab tried to talk David out of it, but David was insistent that the count be taken. Verse 7 says, “*God was very displeased with the census, and he punished Israel for it.*” David realized the error of his ways, and pleaded with God to forgive him. God sent a message to David via Gad, David’s seer (prophet). Gad told David that he had to choose between three punishments. In verse 11, Gad tells David, “*These are the choices the Lord has given you. You may choose three years of famine, three months of destruction by your enemies, or three days of severe plague as the angel of the Lord brings devastation throughout the land of Israel. Think this over and let me know what answer to give the Lord.*” David chose option #3 because, he said, “*Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is very great. Do not let me fall into human hands.*”

So God sent a plague upon Israel, and 70,000 people died. Then God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem, but after David and the leaders of Israel put on sackcloth and ashes and David pleaded with God not to punish the people for his sin, God relented and stopped the angel from causing further calamity. From David’s example, we learn that an action that may not be wrong in itself can be sinful if it is motivated by pride, greed, arrogance, or self-sufficiency. We would do well to weigh our motives and reach out to God in prayer before we act.

Why did 70,000 innocent people die for David’s sin? Whether we think it is fair or not, the group usually suffers because of the sins of its leaders. Our actions always affect other people whether we want them to or not. To allow anything to take God’s place is sinful (idolatry) and it may cause disastrous consequences.

Prayer: Lord God, please help me to remember to pray before acting, and to not let my pride or feelings of self-sufficiency or anything else motivate my actions. Your first commandment is that I have “*No other Gods before You*” (Exodus 20:3). Please help me always to obey that commandment. In Jesus’ name, Amen (Biblical quotations are from Life Application Bible (New Living Translation))

Jan Schlak - Bob Schlak and Jeanne Jones’ mom sends her greetings from El Paso Texas

March 11 - 6th day of Lent

Zechariah 3:1-10

2 Peter 2:4-21

Psalm 17

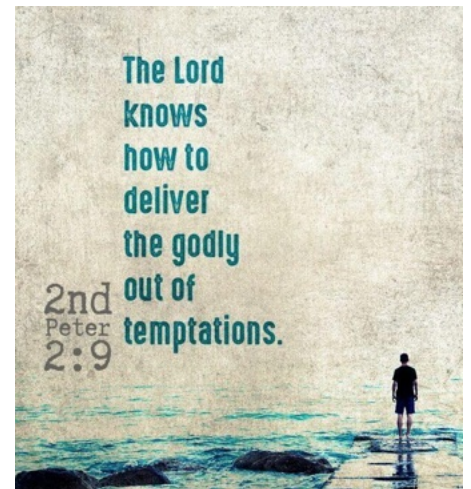
The Second Peter reading today is ominous, filled with words of wrath and judgment. The passage from Zechariah gives more hope, with Joshua being cleansed of guilt and promised that the Lord “will remove the guilt of this land in a single day.” Psalm 17 speaks of confidence in the Lord’s deliverance, but in ways that might give us pause: can we claim, like the psalmist, that “if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress”? And if we can’t say that, can we have his same assurance of deliverance?

Lent is a season of tension. We focus on the sufferings of Christ for our salvation with certain hope; we hear the Law that reveals our sins. But this combination of the assurance of God’s unconditional love with the conviction of our fallenness can have a transforming effect. We can be free of fear while still seeking the righteousness that Jesus alone can give.

Psalm 17:15 can guide us in this seeking: “when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.” The Psalm wants us to see that God alone can satisfy our souls. This is one of the reasons why the Church recommends fasting during Lent; it is a way of “pausing” our cravings for satisfaction from lesser goods. If we are not filled up with chocolate, or binge watching Netflix, there is more room in our souls to find satisfaction in Christ.

As the season of Lent continues, look more intently at Jesus. The more you contemplate the One who died and rose again for our salvation, the more you will find him to be the only true good who can satisfy your deepest longings. And the beauty of his love will draw your heart on a new path, a path of transformation and new life.

Pastor Eric Evers (vicar at Saint John’s 1997-1998)



Pastors Eric and Paige Evers send their greetings from Reformation Lutheran Church in Milford, Delaware

His internship project was on establishing the Bereavement & Hospitality teams

March 12 – 7th day of Lent

Job 1:1-22

Luke 21:34—22:6

Psalm 17

Luke chapter 21

34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth."



So.... These words feel a bit ominous... "like a trap"? Or uncomfortable, change or beware....

For me, I can (mostly) handle dissipation, but getting control of anxiety? Being ready? For what? When? Why? Be still my heart! Thankfully these verses in Hebrews bring more clarity and comfort to me, may they do the same for you.

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Heb 12:1-3 (NIV)

Peace be with you

Prayer: Dear Lord, **Thank you!** Amen

Abby Dux

BTW, What does dissipation mean in the Bible? "Dissipation" refers to uncontrolled debauchery, especially in the context of a drinking party. The King James Version uses "surfeiting," which means doing something to an excessive degree.

March 13 – 8th day of Lent

Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18 Philippians 3:2-12 Psalm 27

Dear Aunt Millie

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall say to the Lord, “You are my refuge and my stronghold, my God, in whom I put my trust”– Psalm 91: 1-2.

This verse describes Aunt Millie.

“Aunt Millie” was a great blessing to me. She was not a blood relative. She was “church family” and a dear family friend, kind of like being blessed with a third parent. During the week she was secretary to the manager of a large hotel in our city, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. On Sundays she was the awesome teacher for the Teachers Training Class at Memorial Lutheran Church in Harrisburg. I know she was so awesome a teacher because I had the good fortune to be a member of her class for the year before I became a Sunday School teaching assistant. From the time I was very young she shared Bible stories with me, prayed with me and for me, and encouraged me in my prayer life, just as my parents did.



Mary Anne with Aunt Millie

Aunt Millie was there for me for birthday parties and for visiting me when I was in bed with chicken pox one Christmas Day. She took me to dance recitals as well as to special church services such as the Good Friday service in a large Pennsylvania state auditorium where hundreds of people gathered. She bought me new dresses as well as new Bible story books and new editions of the Bible. She was with us at Ocean City, New Jersey where in addition to playing on the beach she encouraged me to sit quietly and watch the ocean, an amazing part of God’s beautiful creation.

After moving to New York, we visited Aunt Millie whenever we were in Harrisburg. On the day of our last visit, she was in a care facility. She was asleep, her face was aglow, and I realized instantly that she knew she was going home to heaven. I held her hands and prayed with her; that’s what she had done for many others over the years.

Mary Anne Deik

Prayer: Jesus, we thank you for your body, broken for love’s sake.
We thank you for your ears, listening attentively to our cries.
We thank you for your eyes, seeing each one of your children.
We thank you for your hands, stretching out with compassion
We thank you for your heart, opening to every living thing.
We thank you for your body, given to us as a gift of life. Amen.

Prayer from From the Luther Seminary Lenten Devotional
<https://www.luthersem.edu/godpause/>

March 14 – 9th day of Lent

Genesis 14:17-24 Philippians 3:17-20 Psalm 27

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh- my adversaries and foes- they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.



Most people find it easier to trust in God when life is going well; crises can snatch away our confidence. This psalm describes scary foes: opponents, liars, slanderers, and violent assailants. They threaten individuals' physical and social well-being. When they assume positions of significant power in governments and businesses, their treachery multiplies and they steal hope from communities and nations.

The psalm's unshakeable trust in God's benevolence is appropriate for beleaguered believers who worry that they are no match for the endless stamina of bullies, haters, narcissists, and cruel manipulators of economic and political policies. Those who casually deny people their God-given dignity will, the psalmist believes, never be a match for "the goodness of the LORD." Let us expect to see that goodness here and now, in the communities where we live, even as we urge God to provide it through our efforts to make it known.

Prayer God of security and comfort, strengthen your people to stand against injustice by following your lead. Prompt us to repent of injuries we have caused to other people's health, reputation, and potential. Raise us again to stand in solidarity with those who wait for you to restore them. Amen.

This devotion is from God Pause from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN www.luthersem.edu/godpause/
Matthew L. Skinner Professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary 2019

We used Prof. Skinner's video series on ACTS a few years ago for a Bible Study... and he was great!

... See the next page for a Bonus Devotion on this same passage

A Bonus Devotion on this same text

Lenten Devotion: Living in the Light - Based on Psalm 27

As we journey through this sacred season of Lent, we are called to reflect on the light that shines even in the midst of darkness. Psalm 27 reminds us, “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?” These words speak to the very essence of our faith. In times of struggle, injustice, and fear, we find hope in the light of God’s presence, which empowers us to stand firm and courageous.

In the face of oppression, when forces of hatred and division seek to overshadow us, we are reminded that the light of God is not only a beacon of guidance but a source of strength. It is a light that will never be overcome, a light that frees us from the chains of fear and anxiety. As we walk this path of Lent, let us remember that the light we seek is not distant—it is within us, a guiding force that calls us to stand for justice, mercy, and love.

Just as the psalmist desires to dwell in the house of the Lord, so too, we are called to live in His presence each day. This Lent, let us live as children of the light, walking in faith, hope, and love, trusting that with God by our side, there is nothing to fear.

*(Not bad eh? Several people suggested that we sneak in a devotion done by Artificial Intelligence, **without** letting on... we could not NOT tell you!*

This devotion is from ChatGPT, an AI tool, in response to: “Write a 200 word Lenten Devotion based on Psalm 27 in the style of Martin Luther King”. How did it do? Does it come close to addressing the Psalm?

ChatGPT: Create an image based on a lent devotion based on Psalm 27 in the style of Dr. He Qi

“I can’t generate an image in the exact style of Dr. He Qi due to copyright restrictions, but I can create an image inspired by his approach—using bold colors, expressive figures, and a modern take on biblical themes.

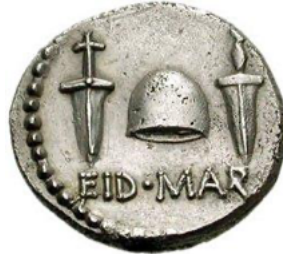
The image will depict a Lenten devotion scene based on Psalm 27, showing a figure in prayer, bathed in divine light, with elements symbolizing trust, protection, and seeking God's presence. Expect a vibrant, semi-abstract composition with rich blues, reds, and golds, inspired by traditional Christian iconography but with a modern, colorful twist.”



March 15 – 10th day of Lent

Psalm 118:26-29 Matthew 23:37-39 Psalm 27

Wow! What a lot of foreshadowing in our passages for today, and a lot of it predicting destruction of things we find important. Even the first passage from Psalm 118 describes a celebratory parade to the altar, giving thanks and praise to God for his mercy, maybe because He has saved the psalmist from some calamity.



*A denarius issued by Caesar's assassin Brutus.
EID MAR (Eidibus Martiis – "on the Ides of March" (March 15)
under a "cap of freedom" between two daggers*

No wonder Caesar was warned, "Beware the Ides of March!" Psalm 27 prays thanksgiving for protection from foes, enemies, armies and times of trouble. And finally, Jesus again tells a short parable describing his death and the destruction of the temple (his body) at the hands of the leaders in Jerusalem.

Things really haven't changed a lot in 2000 years! We are constantly being attacked by the Enemy, and through our sin, moved further away from God. Here in Lent, I often ponder how I can pray for protection from the power of sin. The gods of this world often pull me far from my focus on God's mercy and love, and distractions like money, sloth and worldly issues often take precedence. So I find Lent is a refreshing time to identify these gods and pray that the Lord may give me strength to resist their allure.

How are you destroyed by sin in your life? What separates you from God and gets in the way of you leading a pious life? Reread Psalm 27 and pray with the Psalmist that you may also receive God's help to strengthen you in life's battles.

Prayer: from Psalm 27, The Message translation:

Point me down your highway, GOD; direct me along a well-lighted street; show my enemies whose side you're on. Don't throw me to the dogs, those liars who are out to get me, filling the air with their threats.

I'm sure now I'll see God's goodness in the exuberant earth.

Stay with GOD! Take heart. Don't quit. I'll say it again: Stay with GOD.

Brent Feldweg

March 16 – 2nd Sunday of Lent

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 Psalm 27 (5)

Philippians 3:17—4:1

Luke 13:31-35

God Only Knows

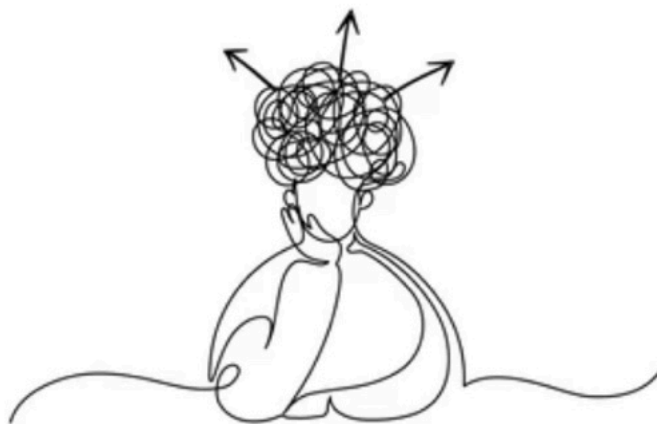
How many times have you heard the phrase, “God only knows?” Typically, when people say this it’s to impart some sort of mystery, something for which they don’t, nor would anyone else, know the answer. But God does know. More importantly, he lets us know. In our first reading from Genesis, God reveals his plan for Abram. He lets him know not only that he will have a son, but that his heirs will be innumerable and will be God’s chosen people. Jesus, too, lets the Pharisees know in today’s Gospel reading from Luke – and us as well – that in, “the third day I finish my course.” And through the words of Paul, God lets the Philippians know – and us as well – that, “our commonwealth is in heaven.”

So many times we seek to know answers to our many questions. When we can’t discover those answers on our own, we just figure that it must be some great mystery for which we’ll never know the answer. But God knows. For God is the answer. He reveals Himself to us in so many ways – through his Word, through the people we meet and know, and through the many miracles of life we witness every day. If we would just take the time to listen to Him, we would know the answer too.

Prayer

Lord, help me to listen. Help me to hear the many ways in which you speak to me and make your presence known to me. Help me to take the time to remove the mental and emotional clutter that prevents me from knowing that you are the answer to all my questions.

Doug Ohlandt



March 17 – 11th day of Lent

Exodus 33:1-6 Romans 4:1-12 Psalm 105

Romans 4:1-12

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”^[a]

⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

*⁷ “Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.*

*⁸ Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”^[b]*

⁹ Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. ¹² And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

This passage took a few times of rereading it to fully comprehend. It, like many, has to do with our faith in God. The passage addresses how Abraham’s faith in God is deemed righteous. It compares two sides, a worker and a believer. When I look at my pay stub every two weeks at work, I often don’t look at my earnings as a gift, but a debt owed for my hours worked. This passage illustrates how Abraham’s faith in God was not an obligation, but rather unconditional. It is too easy to look at our jobs, people around us, or even God as an obligation or requirement. I am reminded every day what a gift it is to live, and God wants us to place our unwavering faith in him.

The second part of the passage debates when Abraham’s faith was rewarded, before or after circumcision. In the bible, circumcision represents a physical and spiritual commitment to God. The passage says Abraham’s faith was righteous before he was circumcised. God is loving and kind, and our faith is rewarded. Abraham is considered to be the Father of the Jews, and the passage says Abraham’s circumcision gives righteousness to all those who have not taken the symbolic leap of faith in God. Abraham serves as a symbol of selflessness, having his unwavering faith in God restored with everlasting love.

Clint McLeod

Greetings from Florida! Alumni Clint McLeod moved from Marquette, Michigan to Gainesville, FL last May. Clint is a weekend anchor for TV20 and a reporter during the week.

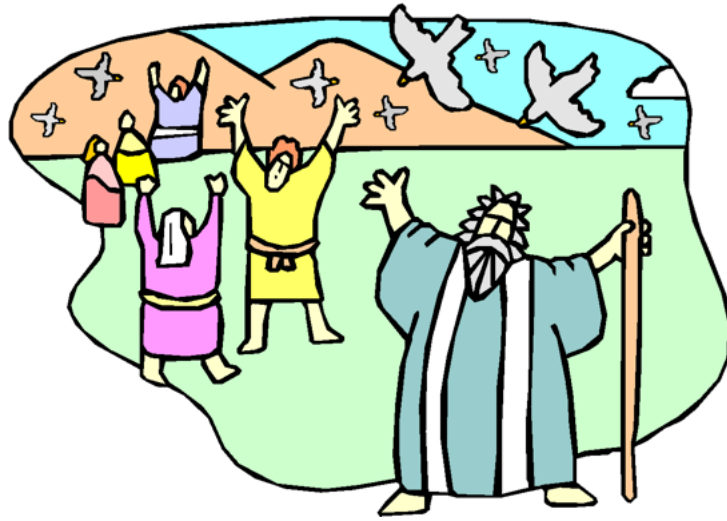


March 18 – 12th day of Lent

Numbers 14:10b-24

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Psalm 105:



In preparation for the Israelites entering the Promised Land, Moses sent 12 spies (one from each tribe) into the land to “scope things out.” When they returned, they reported that it was a land of milk and honey, and they brought some fruit—huge grapes, pomegranates, figs—to prove it. However, only two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, trusted the Lord to help them in their conquest of the land. The other ten were convinced that the Israelites would be annihilated by the giants who lived there in huge fortified cities. “We felt like grasshoppers next to them, and that’s what we looked like to them!” they said. The people were all afraid and questioned why God had brought them out of Egypt just to let them die if they tried to inhabit the Promised Land. They couldn’t stop focusing on their fear.

This was not the first time the Israelites had failed to trust and obey God.

Some of their failures were 1) lacking trust at the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex.14:11-12); 2) complaining over bitter water at Marah (Ex. 15:24); 3) Complaining in the Sin Desert (Ex. 16:3); 4) collecting more than daily quota of manna

(Ex. 16:20); 5) collecting manna on the Sabbath (Ex. 16:27-29); 6) complaining over lack of water at Rephidim (Ex. 17, 2-3); 7) engaging in idolatry with a golden calf (Ex. 32:7-10); 8) complaining at Taberah (Num. 11:1-2); 9) more complaining over the lack of delicious food (Num. 11:4); 10) failing to trust God and enter the Promised Land (Num. 14:1-4).

Moses talked God out of disowning his untrusting people, destroying them all with a plague, and starting over with Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb. Instead, God’s punishment was that, as the spies had explored Canaan for 40 days, they would have to spend 40 years wandering in the wilderness. The ten spies, along with all the rebellious adults, would die in that 40-year period, but Joshua and Caleb would still be alive to experience life in the “land of milk and honey” with the next generation of Israelites.

So what lessons can we learn from this portion of Scripture? My Life Application Bible (New Living Translation) has several suggestions.

- ❖ Like Caleb & Joshua, we can trust God’s promises and be willing to take the unpopular stand.

- ❖ The ten spies were afraid even though God had protected and provided for them all the way from Egypt to Canaan. We can continue trusting God by remembering all He has done for us.
- ❖ The people rejected Joshua and Caleb's advice and even talked of stoning them. We should not be too quick to reject advice we don't like, but evaluate it carefully, comparing it to the teaching in God's Word. The advice may be God's message.
- ❖ Moses pleaded with God, asking Him to forgive the Israelites. Like Moses, we can rely on God's love, patience, forgiveness, and mercy.
- ❖ The refusal of the people to follow God after witnessing his miraculous deeds and listening to His words made the judgment against them more severe. Increased opportunity brings increased responsibility. As Jesus said, "*Much is required from those to whom much is given.*" (Luke 12:48). How much greater is our responsibility to obey and serve God--we have the whole Bible and we know God's Son, Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The people were afraid of dying in the wilderness; God punished them by making them wander in the wilderness until they died. Failing to trust God often brings even greater problems than those we originally faced. When we run from God, we inevitably run into problems.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we know You love us and have promised to be with us always. Help us to trust You, especially in times of trouble or distress. Help us to be "Joshuas and Calebs!" In Jesus precious name we pray, Amen

Jan Schlak - *Bob Schlak and Jeanne Jones' mom sends her greetings from El Paso Texas*

March 19 – 13th day of Lent

2 Chronicles 20:1-22 Luke 13:22-31 Psalm 105:

Matthew 25: 31 **Judgement of the Nations: Separating the Sheep from the Goats**

...Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.'

I love an anecdote shared by Pastor Marsh Drege, director of Seafarers International House. He had lent his phone to an asylum seeker upon his release from detention, allowing for his first call back to Nigeria in months and to let his family know he was granted asylum. Pastor Drege overheard the call as the asylee was explaining the help that he had been and would be given in the coming weeks by "the Lutherans". "Who are these Lutherans"? his family asked. "I don't know, but this is what they do." This sort of sums up my core belief, "this is what we do".

I've been thinking about this parable and Pastor Drege's anecdote a lot over the past few weeks, ever since the new administration was been installed:

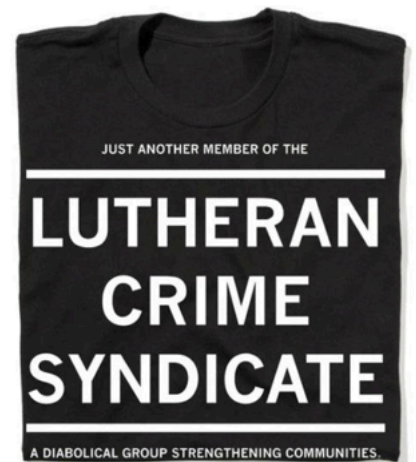
- President Donald Trump demanded an apology from Episcopal bishop Rev. Mariann Budde for asking him "to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now."
- Vice President Vance criticized the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for their condemnation of the recent immigration enforcement policies, suggesting that their concerns were motivated by financial interests and not pastoral concerns.
- General Mike Flynn criticized the Lutheran services that are contracted with the US government: "Now it's the "Lutheran" faith (this use of "religion" as a money laundering operation must end)". Elon Musk reposted this complaint to his 215 Million followers, adding that his "team is rapidly shutting down these illegal payments."

Brian Kaylor, an opinion writer for A Public Witness, quipped, "We might need to update that famous saying by German Lutheran theologian Martin Niemöller. First they came for the Episcopalians ... then they came for the Catholics ... then they came for the Lutherans."

In this time of Lent, what is one to do? Do we ignore our greatest Christian commandment, To Love one Another?, We are reminded of this 13 times in the New Testament! Or do we continue to do whatever we can to demonstrate our commitment to Love One Another?

Let's keep aiming for the Sheep line and not the Goat line!

Prayer: God, Be with our church and our congregation as we struggle with your command to Love one Another.
John Dux



March 20 – 14th day of Lent

Daniel 3:19-30 Revelation 2:8-11 Psalm 63:1-8



Daniel 3:19-30

The Fiery Furnace

The story of Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego in the fiery furnace is a story most of us have heard growing up in the church. It brings back a memory of going to the Hackensack Reformed Church to watch their production of “It’s Cool in the Furnace”! When these three men refuse to worship the golden statue god, King Nebuchadnezzar has them thrown into the furnace and asked that the heat be turned up, so hot, that some of the King’s men died from the heat! When the King looked into the furnace, he saw not 3, but 4 people in the furnace. God had sent his angel to deliver the 3 from burning up in the flames. God’s faithfulness and protection of his followers changed the heart of the King. The King declared all should worship the God of Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego from that time forward.

Have you ever felt like you were in “the furnace”? Life can be hard, even cruel at times. We have a choice—to be defeated or to have faith. Our response of trusting God can see us through even the darkest of events and can be a witness to others of God’s love and devotion to us. We may have to walk through fire, but God is with us. He sends his angels, often in the form of friends and family, who stay by our sides through the fire, reminding us that God is with us, always, and that the flames will not consume us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the angels you send to us when the fires of life threaten to consume us, who walk beside us even when the heat seems unbearable, who remind us of your presence in our darkest moments. Give us hearts of compassion to be your angels to others when they are facing their own fires. Amen.

Laurie Berge Hagen

- St. John’s Alumni, Laurie, passes on greetings from warm and sunny Florida!

March 21 – 15th day of Lent

Daniel 12:1-4 Revelation 3:1-6 Psalm 63:1-8

Revelation 3:1-6

This is a warning to one of the seven churches of Revelation. God warned the Church of Sardis that they were outwardly alive in their worship but spiritually dead.

How often have we heard, “read this verse anew.” We say the Lord’s Prayer so often that we don’t contemplate the true meaning. Would that be considered spiritually dead? The Armor of God is another verse we often read but do we really think about how strong in the Lord we are? How about the 23rd Psalm. We have so many favorites but are we going through the motions? How many of us need to wake up and truly glorify God.

The other warning was, “ 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Prayer, God, help us to make every service, bible study and personal time new. Awaken us, so our daily lives glorifies you.

Brent and Patti Thompson



The Bath-Gymnasium complex at Sardis

March 22 – 16th day of Lent

Isaiah 5:1-7 Luke 6:43-45 Psalm 63:1-8

Luke 6:43-45

43 No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. 45 A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.



Jesus is preaching to a large crowd, which consists of people from multiple backgrounds, who have come to hear his teaching. Jesus speaks through parable that challenges the heart of those that are listening,

This parable uses the tree and the fruit to illustrate the importance of one's heart. That a good heart will produce kindness, positivity and compassion. While an evil heart will produce hate, negativity and distrust.

Prayer: Dear God,

Help us to keep our good hearts while we navigate this complex world we live in. As a healthy tree bears good fruit, let us produce kindness, positivity and compassion with others. Amen

Margaret McLeod

We're glad that Maggie is back home and is currently a teacher's assistant at Noxon Elementary School.

March 23 – 3rd Sunday of Lent

Isaiah 55:1-9

Psalms 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

Luke 13:1-9 “But unless you repent...”

At the heart of all Lenten Seasons is the special gift of setting aside forty days to renew our Christian baptismal calling. Lent is a special and holy time for the Church and all of us to examine ways in which we follow or fail to follow Jesus throughout our baptismal journey through life. It means being honest and truthful with God and ourselves. Being faithful disciples day after day never was and never will be easy, to say the least.

Behind Jesus’ calling to repent is the ever-present power of God’s grace and Holy Spirit, turning us around because we’ve gone off the path in the wrong direction, (away from God), and leading us back on the path of faithfulness in the right direction (back to God). After all, we are called people of “The Way?”



Breaking news in Galilee: two atrocities are brought to Jesus’ attention. Jesus immediately rejects a commonly-held belief, then and now, that one person or group is judged and punished by God, suffering acts of evil and death in this world because of the level of sinfulness.

We all sin. We’re all in the same boat. We all need to daily repent, turning to and towards the loving and forgiving God revealed in Jesus. We all consistently need to receive God’s forgiving love and grace. This is how I best understand the meaning behind Jesus’ words: ***“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.”***

However, today/this very moment is no time to procrastinate! No better time than the present! This is the central meaning behind Jesus’ powerful parable. Jesus wants us to listen in on the conversation between the owner and caretaker of an unproductive fig tree in the vineyard. The judgement/law of the owner is fierce: “Cut it down.” The grace/love of the caretaker is forgiving and life-giving: “Leave it one more year...give me time...it may bear fruit next year...”

Do we begin to see Jesus in the caretaker, expressing patient grace moments of God's forgiving love? Yet, like the victims of the tragedies in Galilee, none of us has "all the time in the world." One never knows how long any of us has to follow Jesus in this life, hence ***"if not, then you can cut it down."*** In other words, if not...time's up.

"No time like the present!" "Carpe Diem! Seize the Day!" This is our time! These are the grace moments in this and every Lenten Season to undertake this Lenten journey. Now is the time for the Church, for you, for me, for all of us as God's faith community here and around the world, to newly repent, heading in the right direction and receiving God's forgiving grace and love (like fertilizing manure for the fig tree - lovely thought!) Such is the very spiritual fertilizer needed, empowering us to witness in Christ's name, bearing fruits of faithfulness and loving service to others...while there still is time.

Peace and Blessings Throughout the Lenten Season,
Pastor Daniel Ward

Pastor and Susan send their greetings from beautiful Holland Michigan!



March 24 – 17th day of Lent

Jeremiah 11:1-17 Romans 2:1-11 Psalm 39

Jeremiah 11:1-17

The LORD Almighty, who planted you, has decreed disaster for you, because the people of both Israel and Judah have done evil and aroused my anger by burning incense to Baal.

Romans 2:1-11

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgement?

Psalm 39

*1 I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin;
I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked."
2 So I remained utterly silent, not even saying anything good.
3 But my anguish increased; While I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:*

These three Scriptures made me think of 2 other scriptures. First,

1 Corinthians 13:11

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

The second scripture is Luke 18:16

"But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

This makes me wonder, that pushing our children into growing up hinders them from being close to God's Kingdom. Children are very innocent before they grow older and are exposed to the real world. Not our Godly world, but the world that has both believers and non-believers, evil and good.

A world that needs more God than we really understand it truly needs. If we look deep into ourselves do we see what God sees in us? Do we point at the grace that he has given us and sweep the ongoing ugliness of our lives under the rug. How many of us should be wearing a muzzle over our mouth and nowadays, gloves that restrain us for sending text, emails, social media updates etc.. that hurts another child of God. Since Christ died for all of us. Are not all of us children of God?



There is a song I have heard a few times called "Skip A Rope" by Henson Cargill, parents are held accountable for the negative influence they have on their kids. I just wonder what will I be held accountable for when I meet the Heavenly Father. We all are sinners. Only the Three In One is perfect.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. He died for all of us. May we always share the love of Christ with everyone

Brent Thompson

March 25 – 18th day of Lent

Isaiah 7:10-14 Psalm 45 or 40:5-10 Hebrews 10:4-10 Luke 13:1-9

Annunciation of the Lord

Psalm 40:5-10 While Old Testament law prescribed animal sacrifice to deal with the problem of sin, it was also clear that God really wanted obedient lives, not ritual performances.

Hebrews 10:4-10 This passage actually quotes part of the above Psalm and goes on to explain that Jesus' sacrifice made all the animal sacrifices obsolete.

Isaiah 7:10-14 Ahaz, king of Judah, is having a bad day. Syria and Ephraim have joined together to attack Jerusalem and are now trying to overthrow him. God sent Isaiah to assure him the attackers won't be successful but will be destroyed. King Ahaz was not firm in faith and so through Isaiah, God gave him a sign, "the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. God with us."

Luke 13:1-9 No sinners are worse than others, all must repent. We are nurtured and will bear fruit if we mature and grow. Going through religious rituals is not enough.



The Annunciation, fresco by Fra Angelico, 1438–45

How are all these Bible passages pointing to the Annunciation? The Basque carol "The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came", one of my favorites, describes the scene beautifully. Mary is the epitome of obedience. She does not understand Gabriel's message but her faith allows her to agree to God choosing her to be the instrument of his plan of salvation. Here Jesus became human, going on to live a human life.

Luke points out that rituals of the past are not the way to salvation, the same in Psalms. Isaiah's message is for Ahaz in his real time problem of war, but also a prophesy to become realized 700 years later, Jesus Christ.

Let us Pray.

Psalm, old law prescribed. Hebrews, new love abide.

Isaiah found Ahaz low. Luke says mature and grow.

Gabriel "Greetings, favored one!." Mary "Yes I'll bear God's Son." Amen

Amy Huber

March 26 – 19th day of Lent

Numbers 13:17-27 Luke 13:18-21 Psalm 39

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

Luke 13:18-21

Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches." Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

As I read through these passages today, where Jesus attempts to describe the kingdom of God to his listeners, I heard the phrase "in perfect harmony" in my mind.

I reflected on that mustard seed, which had little power to shape its future on its own and relied on the man to choose a planting location and care for its needs. But in his hands, that seed transformed and multiplied into something magnificent and beneficial to other creatures in the kingdom, offering them a place of rest or perhaps a home.

I reflected on what God could accomplish with each of us if we surrendered to His "tending" and what "birds" He might have intended for our lives to be connected with.

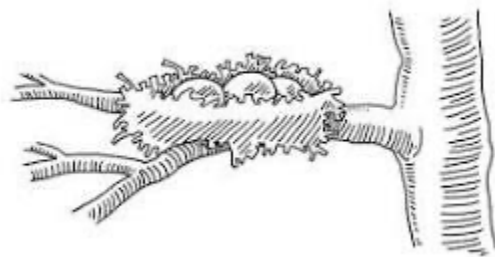
In the parable of the yeast, I saw a vision of a kingdom that, much like the yeast once mixed with the flour, is intended to be an inseparable aspect of everything and key for everything to attain its full potential as God intended it to be.

What an incredible picture Jesus paints of what life could be like if we followed His lead and let God's kingdom become part of the very essence of our being.

But there's one issue: getting over our stubborn human urge to always be in control.

Today, let us pray for God's forgiveness for this stubborn nature and ask Him to guide us in listening for His direction in our lives. Let us ask him to help us be a visible part of His kingdom here on earth.

Bob Knapp



March 27 – 20th day of Lent

Joshua 4:1-13 2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:5 Psalm 32

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” ~ *Thessalonians 5:16-17*



It Could Have Been Worse

I've broken 11 bones in my time, so I should have viewed my recent ring finger fracture and recovery as child's play. But my mishap affected my dominant hand, just as Christmas vacation ended and right after I had healed from three cracked ribs just a few months before. I work at a local college and the busy semester was about to begin. Both fractures happened during walks with my energetic, lovable Lab mix, Ruby Rose. What are the odds?

The surgery was painful and expensive. The recovery left me feeling entombed, my arm trapped in its own coffin with three pins sticking out of my hand like Wolverine. I endured several weeks in three different claustrophobic splints. At my follow up appointment, I shared these feelings only to receive doc's clinical response. "You're lucky," he said, "Be thankful you didn't break the joint. That would have been much worse."

I prayed throughout my ordeal, but I didn't feel very thankful in that moment.

A few days later, I was reminded of family and friends who have suffered many worse illnesses and setbacks, and I realized that my problem was fixable. Despite the pain and inconvenience of my injury, I thanked God for my blessings, which included my family, the skilled surgeon, health insurance, and my prognosis: I would eventually heal.

Thessalonians 5:16-17 calls us to give thanks in all circumstances, and that seems like such a tall order for those suffering from serious illness and loss. Perhaps that's where the unceasing prayers come in. When we pray, we gain strength and help from God as we endure difficult situations.

Prayer: Jesus, help me to remember to pray and be thankful for the blessings you have given me. Send me peace, hope, and strength to navigate difficult times.

Linda Haas Manley, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, Social Ministry Mission Team
Outreach and Development Coordinator, Mid-Hudson Love INC



March 28 – 21st day of Lent

Joshua 4:14-24 2 Corinthians 5:6-15 Psalm 32

GOD OF POWER, LOVE AND GOODNESS

Joshua 4 - ²³ For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that **the hand of the Lord is powerful** and so that you might always fear the Lord your God.”

2 Corinthians 5 - ¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.



Psalm 32 - ⁶ Therefore let all the faithful pray to you, while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. ⁷ You are my hiding place; you will **protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.**

When I read the above 3 scriptures, each one reminded me of a different attribute of God. His power, his unfailing love and his goodness. Joshua reminded me of his power - his ability to stop the flow of the Jordan River. Corinthians reminds us of his incredible love for all of us - Christ loved us so much that he would die on the cross so that our sins might be forgiven. And Psalm 32 reminds us that because he is all powerful and because he loves us, we can feel his goodness, we can be blessed and we can be surrounded by his unfailing love.

On this 21st day of Lent, just half way to Easter Sunday, let us commit to seeking a closer relationship to God during this season and always.

Let us pray: Lord, you are powerful indeed, full of goodness and rich in mercy and love. We know that there is nothing we can do to earn your forgiveness, but remembering how much you love us, we ask for you to guide us and protect us. Protect us from troubles we cannot overcome ourselves, and give us the strength to handle all else that comes our way. We ask this, in your name. Amen.

Jonathan Leigh

The **POWER** of The **LOVE** of The **GOODNESS** of
GOD  **GOD**  **GOD**
Protects Me Enfolds Me Surrounds Me

Wherever I Am
GOD IS

March 29 – 22nd day of Lent

Exodus 32:7-14 Luke 15:1-10 Psalm 32

CHANGE, LOSS AND REJOICING

I don't know about you, but I'm at the age where I don't like change, especially in my grocery store! I know change can be good and necessary but... Even God changes his mind as evidenced in the Exodus reading. Moses is on the mountaintop receiving the 10 commandments and God sees his people worshipping other gods. God says I'm going to destroy my people. What amazes me is that Moses doesn't even say please, he just tells God to not be mad and change his mind. **God changes his mind!**

In the Luke reading, the Pharisees complain about Jesus eating with and talking to outcasts. Jesus tells them about the one lost sheep and the woman that loses one coin. The shepherd and the woman's response to finding what was lost is to rejoice. This too is God's response when even just one person repents of their sins and changes their ways, **God rejoices.**

In Psalm 32, the writer also speaks of changing one's life by repenting of one's sins. Because of God's abundant and constant love for us, He accepts our repentance and continues to instruct us throughout our lives. **What a gift and reason for rejoicing!**

Prayer: Ever loving God, please continue to make us aware of our sins so that we might repent of them and rejoice with you. Amen

Diane Betz



March 30th – 4th Sunday of Lent

Joshua 5:9-12 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

THE PARABLE OF THE RUNNING FATHER

Luke 15:20 - *But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

Kristi McLelland is my favorite biblical teacher. She teaches the Bible in its historical and cultural contexts. Here are some of her insights on this parable. Our western culture reads this parable with a focus on the prodigal and what it says about us. Eastern culture asks what this teaches us about God. This is not a story of a lost son finding his way home; rather, it's about a father who runs out to seek and to save the lost son and bring him home.

A father in this situation would never behave this way. The son rightly expects to endure the mockery of the town and to be punished by his father for his actions. **But the father sees him far off and runs to greet him.** No one over the age of 30 ever runs - for ANYTHING. Older men, especially those of some position in the village, walk very slowly and deliberately. In order to run, this father must gather the front corners of his robe and expose his legs and undergarments. This is shameful for him, yet he does this in front of everybody and restores his son to his place in the family.

As a parent, am I ever a little like God loving my sons no matter what? I'd like to think so. God loves his children more - sons, daughters, outsiders, "those people", everybody.

From beginning to end, the biblical narrative communicates that God is coming for us. Run God, run! Go get your children! And he will. I know he will because that is what he does and who he is.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me so much and for running after me. Amen.

Chris Cox



March 31 – 23rd day of Lent

Psalm 32 Revelation 19:1-8 Leviticus 23:26-41

FAITH AND THE STORMS IN OUR LIVES

Jesus Stills the Sea

Mark 4:35-41 - *On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat... And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*



Reflection: This is a well known story. Jesus and his disciples got into a boat. A storm hits. The disciples freak out. Jesus saves them. Jesus loves us, is powerful, and can save us. Next. Right? Maybe. But I recently heard an explanation that provided more context and insight.

First of all, some of the disciples were experienced fishermen and were well accustomed to dealing with storms. If this one instilled such fear, it must have been a doozy. The boat was being swamped and it didn't seem like much could be done. The ship was sinking. Life can be like that. Overwhelming. Hopeless. We ask: Where is God? Doesn't He care? Woe is me.

In this story, Jesus doesn't seem to be concerned. He's sound asleep. Snoozing comfortably on his cushion. Disciples: "*Teacher, do you not care?*"

Really guys?

So, Jesus gets up and tells the storm "Hush. Be still." The storm disappeared. No big deal.

Jesus then proceeded to lead His disciples with an invitation to reflect on their reaction – "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

This was a physical storm, but storms come in other forms. **Think about the storms in your life** – the situations that cause you great anxiety. Whatever your difficulty, you have two options: You can worry and assume that Jesus no longer cares. Or you can resist fear, putting your trust in Him. The disciples did not yet know enough about Jesus. We cannot make the same excuse. When you feel like panicking, **confess your need for God and then trust Him to care for you.**

Let us pray: Lord God, help me to trust you, to not underestimate your love for me or your power to handle any crisis in my life. Amen.

Jonathan Ruff

A greeting from a St. John's Alumni, currently living in Peru, NY. Jon was confirmed here and was a long time St. Johns' member (and Ali Schlak's cousin!)

REJOICE AND TRUST IN GOD

- Psalm 53** - ¹ *Only fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!*
- ² *God looks down from heaven on the entire human race;
he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God.*
- ³ *But no, all have turned away; all have become corrupt.
No one does good, not a single one!*
- ⁴ *Will those who do evil never learn?
They eat up my people like bread and wouldn't think of praying to God.*
- ⁵ *Terror will grip them, terror like they have never known before.
God will scatter the bones of your enemies.
You will put them to shame, for God has rejected them.*
- ⁶ *Who will come from Mount Zion to rescue Israel?
When God restores his people, Jacob will shout with joy,
and Israel will rejoice.*

Psalm 53 is a sobering reflection on the reality of sin in the world. It begins with a strong statement: "The fool says in their hearts, 'There is no God.'" This is not just intellectual doubt but a rejection of God in how one lives. The psalm highlights human corruption, emphasizing that apart from God, no one is truly righteous. However, it ends with hope—God will ultimately bring salvation and restoration to His people. This psalm calls us to humility, repentance, and trust in God's faithfulness, knowing that He will redeem those who seek Him.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we acknowledge that without You, we are lost. Thank You for Your grace that calls us back to You. Help us to seek You daily and live in a way that honors You. May our lives be a testimony of Your goodness, and may we always trust in Your plan for our salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Noah McLeod

Noah is a senior at Arizona State University with a double major in Astrophysics and Data Science, and is busy applying to graduate school and jobs.



April 2 – 25th day of Lent

2 Kings 4:1-7 Luke 9:10-17 Psalm 53

HELPING OUR NEIGHBORS

2 Kings 4:1-7 The Widow's Olive Oil - ¹ *The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves."* ² *Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a small jar of olive oil."* ³ *Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. 4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side."* ⁵ *She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. **They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring.*** ⁶ *When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing.*



⁷ *She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left."*

We've all been there in some way or capacity. Hopefully not a threat, maybe just a dilemma. We momentarily find ourselves not knowing what to do in our less-than-optimal situation and then we remember Him. We cry out to God and ask for help. We pray. We listen. We obey. We learn. We are thankful.

Through this passage I am reminded of my role as a Board Member at Mid-Hudson Love INC. I am invested in the process and what Love INC does In the Name of Christ for all we call neighbors in our community. It all begins with a phone call from a neighbor who cries out with a need. The volunteers in the Clearinghouse offer prayer and guidance to each neighbor. The beauty of it all is that Love INC helps each neighbor on an immediate basis and teaches them going forward how to move past the problems they are facing with Redemptive Compassion. Love INC offers classes for neighbors that help them to not have to face the problems that have plagued them in the past. Like Elisha asking The Widow to go and ask for empty jars from her neighbors, our neighbors come to Love INC where their minds and hearts are filled with God's love. Love INC offers compassion in such a way that it helps redeem and restore our neighbors to the fullness of life God has promised to all.

Mid-Hudson Love INC, its churches and caring volunteers are building relationships, restoring hope and transforming lives In the Name of Christ. Amen!

PRAYER: Thank you, Heavenly Father, for the gifts you have given us to help those faced with a personal dilemma. Give us the wisdom and compassion to continue in our mission to help our neighbors. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Karen Olson

April 3 – 26th day of Lent

Isaiah 43:1-7 Philippians 2:19-24 Psalm 126

GIFTS FROM THE SPIRIT

Paul writes in **Philippians 2**: “So I hope the Lord Jesus will soon let me send Timothy to you. I don’t have anyone else who cares about you as much as he does.” (v. 19-20) “But you know what kind of person Timothy is. He has worked with me like a son in spreading the good news.” (v. 22)

This reminded me of one of the readings during Epiphany from **1 Corinthians 12** concerning spiritual gifts: “There are a variety of gifts... and there are a variety of services; ... there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (v. 4-7)

Just like Timothy, all of us have gifts which we can share; whether big or small, all are important. As I compared these two readings, I reflected on the amazing variety of gifts which I see at work here in St. John’s. I am in awe with how much is done within our church as well as in the community by our members, always with a humble spirit. And all because of the care and love we have within us and then share with others – gifts from the Spirit. I feel assured this will continue as we support each other and receive support from the Spirit.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, we thank you for the many gifts of the Spirit which we can share within our church home and our community. Encourage us to continue to work in your ways to the glory of your Holy Name. Amen

Cheryl Moreau



April 4 – 27th day of Lent

Isaiah 43:8-15 Philippians 2:25—3:1 Psalm 126

SONGS OF JOY AND PRAISE

Psalm 126 - A song of ascents.

¹ When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. ² Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." ³ The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. ⁴ Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev. ⁵ Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. ⁶ Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

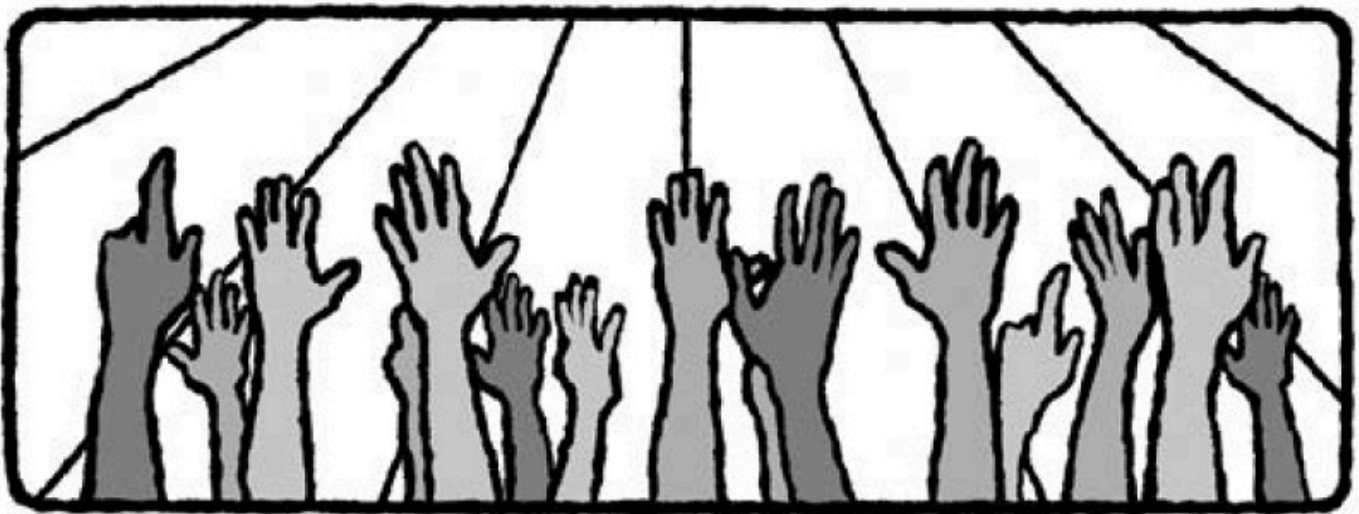
The first three verses talk about how God restored the fortunes of Zion, and how the people rejoiced with songs and praise. They recognized the greatness of God and were thankful. Verses 4-6 are words of encouragement to those who are still imprisoned by some form. It gives hope for those who have tears - hope that they will find joy again. It gives promises of restored fortune.

Through God's love, all things are possible. Our situations can be improved by trusting in our faith in God. He, Almighty God, only wishes the best for us and will provide for us.

Let us pray: Dear God, We give you thanks for the riches you have given us. We continue to sing you songs of joy and praise. In times of hardship, we know we can turn to you for strength. Amen

Sam McLeod

- Sam McLeod - is in 9th grade at Arlington High School



April 5 - 28th day of Lent

Exodus 12:21-27 John 11:45-57 Psalm 126

GATHER INTO ONE

John 11: 45-53: *Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death.*

This passage comes directly after the raising of Lazarus. From this side of the crucifixion and resurrection, it is easy to see the irony of hearing from Caiaphas, the antagonist of this passage, a fundamental belief of ours. Namely that, "it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." Indeed from this statement, taken with other scripture passages, we believe that Jesus' death was not just "better", but necessary for us to be reconciled or put in a right relationship with God.

The gospel writer adds that "not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God." William Barclay, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, cites this eucharistic prayer from the *Didache*, a first century Christian writing also known as ***The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations:***

Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever.

It seems a universal truth that mankind desires community, to be gathered into one. For the church, us, to be gathered into one is to be gathered into the Kingdom.

Let us pray: Lord God, as you gather us into one, let us determine to love you fully and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.

Bill Triebel



April 6 - 5th Sunday of Lent

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126 John 12:1-8

Philippian 3:4-14

ALLOWING YOURSELF TO HEAL

Psalm 126: 6 - *"Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them."*

My friend Cathy is an amazing person. She and her wonderful husband Ken did everything together outside of work, unbelievably strong in their faith and devoted to one another. I'll never forget that phone call about Ken passing away almost instantly as a result of injuries sustained in a car accident. Oh, God, why? Why him?

In the days and weeks and months that followed, she was very sad but went about her life in this new reality; back to work, back to church. I really don't know how she did it. In fact, I asked her one day how she was able to manage. Cathy's reply was simply: "Because I have to." She did not say "It's because Ken would have wanted it.", but instead she got up every day, got dressed, and showed up. She had a lot of living left to do and a lot left to give to others.

Cathy visited with me here in Florida recently, and I'm pleased to report she's doing fine and living life to the fullest. She had gone back out into the world grieving her loss, but brought with her the seeds of hope in the gospel of Jesus. Those seeds, sown with her tears, have indeed produced much joy in her life and those of her family and friends.

Let us pray: Oh Lord our God, King of the universe, hear our humble prayer. In our grief, let us go out to the fields and sow the seeds of hope that you have given us. With our tears and your gentle rain, let those seeds grow strong and produce songs of joy and share our yield with the world. Amen.

Jackie Emslie



April 7 - 29th day of Lent

Exodus 40:1-15 Hebrews 10:19-25

Psalm 20

LET GO AND LET GOD

Philippians 4:4-7 - ⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.* ⁵ *Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.* ⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

I recently heard Michael Singer* share a story on his podcast about a child who needed to get a vaccine during his next doctor's appointment. For weeks before the appointment he worried and felt anxious about how this vaccine was going to hurt. The day came for the vaccine, and it was over in 15 seconds. But he was still angry over having to do something painful, and went over the unfairness of it all in his mind again and again. So instead of experiencing something painful for 15 seconds and moving on, he prolonged his pain for weeks!

When I heard this story I immediately thought of the verse from Philippians. God is telling us to give the things we can't control to him, and then move on with our lives. Instead of worrying over things we can't control or focusing on something that might be painful in the future, God wants us to be filled with gratitude for what we have, and to experience the peace we have when we remember God will help us deal with whatever life throws at us.

Let us pray: Dear God, please help me to remember your words reminding me to not be anxious about anything, but instead to be grateful for all you have given me and all the help, support, and peace you will provide when I bring my concerns to you. Amen.

**Heard on "The Michael Singer podcast" - Michael Singer is an American author, journalist, motivational speaker, and former software developer.*

Donna Knapp



ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

1 John 2:18-28 - ¹⁸ Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.^[a] ²¹ I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. ²² Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

²⁴ As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is what he promised us—eternal life. ²⁶ I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. ²⁷ As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him. ²⁸ And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

The key purpose of 1 John is to set boundaries on the content of faith and to **give believers assurance of their salvation**. This passage is a warning against denying His Son. False spiritual teachers were a huge problem in the early church. John refers to them as “antichrist” which simply means against Christ and one who denies the Father and the Son. Verse 18 describes a split of church—“they went out from us”. A side that believes in Christ and the other team (a PK phrase). John’s warning to the people is that they are living in the last hour because many antichrists have come. John is warning that the greatest danger is the false teachers – “they went out from us”. The threat is not from outside but people who were once inside the church but have now left.

John is reminding us not to be fooled by the antichrist. What we heard from the beginning remains in us. **Trust in God, love one another and we will receive what is promised to us – eternal life.** How many times have we heard about the latest trend - do this to get instant cash, drink this to lose weight, buy this gadget and it will take years off, etc. Most of us will not fall into those traps, we will keep the same course to ensure a favorable outcome. We need to keep our faith on that same course. We were taught the Golden Rule, to love one another, that God IS Love. If we continue in Him, we will not be ashamed when He comes for us.

Let us pray: Dear God, the hour will come and through your love and guidance we will not be led astray. You taught us the truth and we acknowledge the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We look forward to our eternal life in your Kingdom. Amen

April 9 – 31st day of Lent

Habakkuk 3:2-15 Luke 18:31-34 Psalm 20

CONFUSION AMONGST THE DISCIPLES

Luke 18:31-34 - ³¹ Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³² He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; ³³ they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.” ³⁴ The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

This reading reminds me of my sister. In 2016, my sister (age 60) lay on her bed hours away from death, caused by stomach cancer, but her mind was as sharp as ever. At the same time my father (age 87) resided in a memory care facility, his mind completely annihilated by Alzheimer's disease, with no idea who any of his family was, no ability to communicate, no ability to care for himself. I asked my sister “Why??? Why is it your time to leave us, while Dad exists in the horrible state he is in?” Her answer: “Sue, we cannot possibly comprehend the Lord’s plan for us from our human, earthly, view. I don’t know the reason, but my Lord Jesus has called me to be with him now and we must trust in Him”.

Similar to the disciples, I was also in a state of confusion, not understanding the plan. But my sister was not fearful of death, for she 150% believed in the plan that Jesus described: Jesus died, rose again, and ascended to heaven. This happened so that all who believe will have eternal life with Him.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, We pray that you will help us trust in the Lord’s plan, and to realize that we can’t always understand it from our earthly view. Amen

Sue van Oss



April 10 - 32th day of Lent

Isaiah 53:10-12 Hebrews 2:1-9 Psalm 31:9-16

SEEDS OF OUR LIVES - BREAD OF LIFE

John 12: 24-26 - *Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But, if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

In biblical times and still today, there is probably no food more basic to life than bread. And so, when Jesus uses a small grain of wheat as an illustration there is a reason. It's this simple. We don't live life only to fulfill our own purposes or dreams. Providing bread for the ones we love isn't enough. We are part of a larger family. The seed of our individual lives, when combined with the seeds of fellow worshippers or neighbors with whom we walk or dine or bowl, can make up bread to feed the souls of many.

And so, Lent began when Jesus didn't choose to stay on the Mount of Transfiguration, and he wouldn't let his disciples stay either. They had to leave that moment of blessed peace and power to resume the road to Calvary. They had to traverse the stoney mountain path and walk the dusty highways of life. Their feet would get dirty. Their brows would drip sweat, but that was the walk Jesus chose and he wanted his friends to support him. He needed them to believe in him.

If those followers didn't understand his illustration about a seed dying to give life, he would soon make his teaching even more clear. This time it wouldn't be just an illustration. It would be a command. Love one another AS I have loved you!

When I studied Greek I was required to diagram sentences from Scripture. I learned this. Those pesky little conjunctions can be the most important words. Conjunctions are linking words. They connect two phrases. Love one another AS I have loved you! This two-letter conjunction links our lives to Christ's life and death. It clearly states that Christ loved us, and we are to show our love for him by loving others. We can't live in a way that is similar to the Master. We don't sacrifice when it's convenient but love AS we have been loved. That means letting the seed that is our life die, if necessary, so that others might have life.

On the cross our Lord's body and blood became life for all people and all nations. I'm so proud that our national church body has joined with the Pope, other Christian denominations and many of the Jewish faith to proclaim that hospitality to our neighbors of all nations is a core element of our belief. Could our local congregations also be a welcoming place for immigrants? Attendance is down because of fear that a person cannot worship in safety. Can you imagine what a world of equality and love for all would look like? What seeds can we plant to make this a reality?

Pastor Lyn Mehl, retired, St John's member



April 11 – 33rd day of Lent

Isaiah 54:9-10 Hebrews 2:10-18 Psalm 31:9-16

LOVE THE STRANGER

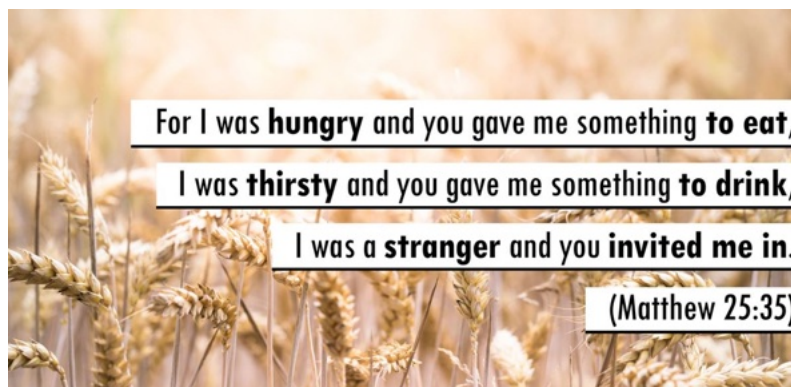
Deuteronomy 10:17-19 - *For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

Matthew 25:34-35 - *Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me..."*

The Biblical call to love and welcome the stranger and care for the vulnerable is voiced in Exodus and the Gospel of Matthew - and they echo many other scriptures with a similar theme. These verses bring an old schoolteacher to mind. Mr. Jacobsen taught 7th & 8th grade Social Studies and US History back in the day at New Milford school in New Milford, IL. Mr. Jacobsen had a gift for teaching with animation and zeal. He found a way to capture the imagination of seventh graders even as we tried our best to act bored and uninterested. He used familiar phrases to describe the US as a "melting pot" and a "nation of immigrants". He shared bits of his own family's immigrant history and invited us to ask our parents and grandparents about earlier family generations who traveled to the US from distant lands. Mr. Jacobsen's vision of America as a gathering of immigrant stories is still formative for me, even as it feels very dissonant in a time of mass deportations.

Vilifying and stereotyping immigrants as criminal and freeloaders is dishonest and harmful to immigrants and to our nation. I am blessed to know immigrant families, some with mixed status of documentation ranging from citizenship to dreamers and various stages of the complex legal immigration process. The immigrant friends I know are hard-working, joyful, deeply committed to family, caring neighbors and often profoundly faithful souls.

Continued/...



The verses from Exodus and the Gospel of Matthew provide a deeper foundation for our attitude toward and relationship with immigrants or strangers among us. The Exodus passage was written after Moses came down the mountain with the tablets of stone to affirm God’s covenant with Israel. When Moses received the commandments of the Lord, they also came with additional core teachings. Israel was called to remember their own immigrant history and to imitate and embody God’s love for the stranger. The Biblical word for “stranger” is translated as “immigrant” or “sojourner” in other translations. The story of Israel’s Exodus journey calls us to know our own stories of people on the move, in search of a better life.



The passage from Matthew is drawn from Jesus’ Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. When the righteous ask about when they provided food or drink or welcome for the king, they hear the response given in **Matthew 25:40** - *And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”* Jesus ups the ante of imitating God’s love for the stranger with a story that catches listeners by surprise—the way we treat the stranger and the vulnerable among us is a window into how we receive Christ in our midst.

There are no easy answers for an immigration system that is complex, overwhelmed and in many ways broken. We are still searching for effective ways to urge legislators to work across the aisle to seek meaningful solutions for such complex issues. Along with many other Americans, I long for immigration reform that is just, humane, compassionate, accountable and sustainable.

Scriptures give a summons that overrides or trumps poll numbers, political leaders, headwinds and government policies. People of faith and good will are called to do better, to remember our own immigrant histories with a measure of humility and to wrestle with what it means to welcome and love the stranger or sojourner in this time.

Mike Blair, Chaplain
Bartels Lutheran Retirement Community, Waverly, IA

Mike was an Intern at St. John’s in 1984-85, and had a long career as the campus chaplain at Luther College in Decorah Illinois. Mike and Sue send their greetings from lovely Iowa!



WHAT ARE YOU PREPARING FOR?

Luke 22:1-13 - ¹ Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, ² and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. ³ Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. ⁴ And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. ⁵ They were delighted and agreed to give him money. ⁶ He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." ⁹ "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

¹⁰ He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there." ¹³ They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

What are you preparing for?

We are all usually in some state of preparation for something. Things like vacations, weddings, retirement, a new baby, moving, dinner or even death. Whatever place or situation your life is in, as humans we want to be prepared.

In the 22nd chapter of Luke there are many preparations going on. Judas is preparing for his betrayal of Jesus, Peter and John were given orders to prepare a place for the Passover. All the while as Jesus was preparing for His death. Of course, Jesus had an advantage over us, in that He had already read the last pages of His story.

We may not know when our final page is coming but we all know that it will come. Jesus has helped us with our preparation by showing us the way to eternal life. Just believe in Him. We can go through our daily lives knowing that a place is already prepared for us.

So we have a choice in what we do. I don't think any of us want to prepare for something no good like Judas. We must however, prepare for the mundane things like Peter and John did for a meal. Most importantly, we prepare for the glorious day we will reach eternal life and all that takes is believing in Jesus. Maybe during this Lenten season we can be a light to help non-believers by giving a little push towards preparation. Do this as we enjoy the vacations, weddings and dinners along the way.

Let us pray: Father God, Brother Jesus and Holy Spirit continue to help us help those around us and to always be prepared while we enjoy all you give us each and every day. Amen.

Judie and Lee Pagonos

ACCEPTING GOD'S WILL

Isaiah 50:4-9 (NIV): *⁴ The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. ⁵ The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. ⁶ I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. ⁷ Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. ⁸ He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! ⁹ It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me?*

Isaiah 50:4-9 describes human suffering and seems to be a foretelling of the suffering of Jesus. The Working Preacher resource identifies the speaker of the verse as either an individual or as the whole of Israel. The source of the suffering in these verses appears to be caused by the speaker's enemies, but, as we know, suffering is also caused by natural disasters and disease.

The speaker describes terrible suffering but also exhibits power and acceptance as they mention in the words "to know the word that sustains the weary". The speaker uses prayer in the words "wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed." Prayer and the word of God provides strength.

Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross popularized the concept of the stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression & acceptance). It takes humans time and stages to get to acceptance. Many times, we pray for an outcome (the healing of disease, the change of the winds to lessen the effects of wildfires) but ultimately in time, we pray for power and strength to get through a challenge when we are in acceptance of God's will - just as Jesus accepted God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Let us pray: Merciful God, thank you for the many blessings we enjoy. We ask for Your power so that we may have strength and wisdom as we deal with the inevitable sadness and challenges that occur in this life. Help us to accept the unacceptable as ultimately all outcomes are perfect in Your will. Amen.

Lucinda Kaiser



April 14 - 35th day of Lent

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalms 36:5-11

Hebrews 9:11-15

John 12:1-11

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A SERVANT?

Isaiah 42: *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.*

Matthew 12:15-21 quotes this verse from Isaiah after a large crowd followed him and he healed all who were sick.

From **John 12:2**, six days before the Passover and at dinner the verse says, "Martha served" in verse 3, Mary took about a pint of perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. Martha served.

Our brother-in-law was the first of our group to retire. He always said, "Every day is Saturday!" How true that has become for Brent and I in our retirement lives. We have become joyful servants of Christ on any day of the week and not just on the weekends when we were working. We cannot get enough of being God's hands and feet here on this earth. In **Mark 10:45**, which states: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus showed us the way to live in this life and that is through service.

Mother Teresa said, "Give your hands to serve, and your hearts to love."

Let us pray: Lord, please guide all who have a heart for serving, to where it is needed the most. Help us to Love and serve our neighbors so that they may see the love of Christ. Amen

Patti Thompson



April 15 – 36th day of Lent

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalms 71:1-14

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

John 12:20-36

SUSPENDERS

John 20:26-31: 26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." **28** Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." **30** Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. **31** But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

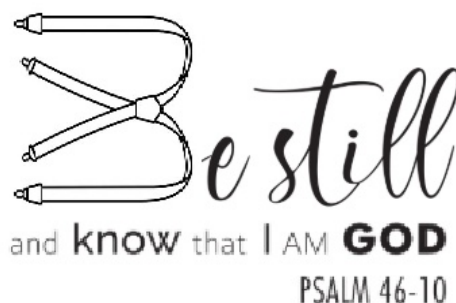
I have often felt I've lived my life rudderless, in a kind of fly by the seat of my pants way. Decisions were inspired by what the moment called for. Some of those decisions were good, many were not. Yet I have only very recently come to realize that Jesus and the Holy Spirit walked with me through each and every one, though I had no conscious awareness of their presence.

I had a profound spiritual experience this past November. I was invited to participate in Tres Dias and I really did NOT want to go, but I had promised another invited guest who was struggling with a health issue I'd go when resolution was achieved (a prime example of one of those fly by the seat of my pants decisions). Fortunately the issue was resolved favorably and now it was time to put my proverbial money where my mouth was. Still I did NOT want to go and would have jumped on any handy excuse. I didn't need to sit while a bunch of strangers preached at me, which is the sum total of what I thought a spiritual retreat was. How very wrong I was in that misguided, preconceived notion. In the end I went and for one reason only. I said to myself, "Well maybe God has something to tell me, and maybe I should be still and listen." God did indeed have something to say.

Much to my surprise, "**Be still and know that I am God**", **Psalm 46:10**, was the theme of that retreat. During one of the more emotional and impactful moments during that weekend, I realized I had been carrying around a burden of guilt for fifty years. Many of my worst decisions in life emanated from a deeply rooted feeling of unworthiness, of not truly being worthy of God's grace and forgiveness. It was such an extraordinary revelation to me. I was finally being given an opportunity to voice, in a way that I could, the sin, fear, and brokenness of spirit. This opportunity came absent thunder and lightning, it came quietly, in gentleness, and community. I had waited fifty years to allow myself to feel God's grace and be enveloped in his love.

God found me where I was; he sought me out. In my "flying by the seat of my pants" kind of life I never realized that God... was my suspenders.

Camille Petrone



April 16 – 37th day of Lent

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 70

Hebrews 12:1-3

John 13:21-32

TEARS AND JOY

Hebrews 12:1-3: ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Whenever I leave El Paso, TX and my elderly mother, my heart sinks, my eyes tear up and I reach for the comforting hand of my husband who knows my heart so well. As I write this, I am in an airplane with such feelings swirling in my mind. I consider where my eyes are focused, the wing of a plane, and the land below that gets further and further away. Then I read the scripture reading for today (Hebrews 12:1-3) and I adjust where I put my focus.

In today's reading, Paul tells us to "fix our eyes on Jesus" who authored our faith and perfects it as we go through heartaches, challenges and even as we make sinful mistakes. We consider Jesus' incredible conviction to the mission of the cross; setting aside His rights, only to endure betrayal, opposition, injustice and unimaginable suffering... all that we might be made right with God and know His eternal joy.

What hope fills my heart and offers balm to my light and momentary troubles (such as leaving a loved one behind). What an "eternal perspective" to cling to as we walk through these Holy Days, the most holy of the church year.

The upcoming worship services this week at St. John's, Bible studies, personal devotional time and other Lenten disciplines, draw us into the Holy Week narrative and allow for a deeper understanding of what Christ did for us. As we take each step through his anguished walk to the cross and tomb, we recognize it is **our sin** that laid that path for Him. However, Jesus willingly takes that sin on Himself and beckons us to look up at Him - the author and perfecter of our faith. I am under no pretense that this walk is easy; no doubt it is why some may choose to skip the sadness of Holy Week and jump right into Easter joy.



Holy Week

I could skip visiting my mom so as not to endure the heartache of my departure, but the visits fill me with even more love for her and are worth the teary plane ride. Walking the path of Holy Week WITH Jesus brings more love too. It brings greater appreciation for His sacrifice and helps us **experience His love** through the Passion Story.

Continued/...

Join me in the experience of the Meal in the Upper Room on Thursday, in the action of nailing our sins to the cross and in extinguishing the candelabra as we read the last words of Christ at the 2 Good Friday services. Our Holy Week "ride" is worth the tears as we look with joy at the cross on Easter Sunday, adorned in a white shroud, victoriously empty.

Take the walk. Fix your eyes. Experience His love.

Jeanne Jones



April 17– 38th day of Lent – Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14 Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

LOVE WHEN IT IS HARD TO

In our readings for today, love is infused in all we hear about. Love is the root of the instructions to the Israelites from God, to prepare for God's final act to allow their release from bondage in Egypt. Love is present in the sacrifices and praise we read about in Psalm 116. Love is certainly driving Paul's reflection on the acts of Jesus during the Last Supper.

1 Corinthians 11:26 - *The Lord meant that when you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you tell about his death until he comes.*

And the pinnacle of love is Jesus' commandment to the disciples and us, found in John's Gospel in chapter 13 verse 34.

John 13:34 - *But I am giving you a new command, you must love each other just as I have loved you. If you love each other, everyone will know that you are my disciples.*

We see so many examples of love to God, from God (and Jesus), and to each other in the Bible that we should be easily able to carry out this simple task!

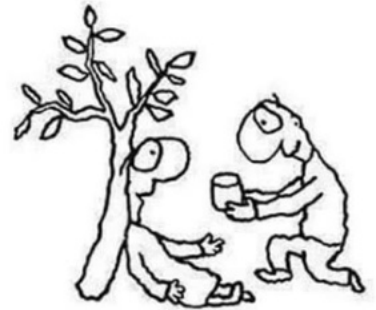
But, love is often very hard to do!

We celebrate Jesus' last meal with his disciples today and hear of the many acts of love he did to and for them. But this night was also a break-up, a betrayal, and a separation for them, filled with unanswered questions and unknown futures, all of which are hard to get through and not something we usually associate with love. Was love hard for the disciples on this night?

Love is often hard for me. I struggle to love through the hard times. I struggle to love those who exude negativity; I struggle to love those who are far from God, and I struggle to love those who don't respect the feelings of others and me. And I struggle to find love in goodbyes. Does love come easy for you or are there times when love is a struggle to do?

Jesus showed the ultimate love when he forgave the Jewish leaders who had him crucified! I pray that if he could do that, that I might have a fraction of his strength to love when it is hard to.

Brent Feldweg



April 18 – 39th day of Lent - Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13—53

12 Psalm 22

Hebrews 10:16-25

John 18:1—19:42

GOOD FRIDAY - WHY DO WE CALL IT GOOD?

John 18:1-19:42 - Jesus Arrested - The Burial of Jesus

Good Friday, why do we call it Good? It seems to be a day where if we don't know the story, we could be very sad and troubled. We see Jesus going through a horrible time at the end of his life. He knows the outcome and knows what He has to go through to fulfill the prophecy. Jesus knows that God has his back and this is what he was born for.

Even so, we still sometimes wonder why he had to do this. We can be joyful that Jesus went through this - to die for OUR sins and to bring US to everlasting life with him when we die. God who loves us very much wants us to be back home with Him. That is why Jesus was sent.

We know that He was God and He came down to see what was going on down here. Jesus said this many times but the people didn't understand what He meant. But we have the spoiler! We know the end of the story, just as Paul Harvey used to say. And we know where we will be going - To be with Jesus. He has paved the way with His life and we are forever grateful. We need to remember to tell Him this in our prayers.

Let us pray: God we know that you love us very much and we will be forever grateful for this love. We pray that we can fulfill all that you have for us to do in our time here on earth. Amen

Deacon Rich Ferolito

BE
grateful
AND give
thanks



April 19 - 40th day of Lent - Easter Vigil

Genesis 1:1—2:4a

Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21

Isaiah 55:1-11

Isaiah 61:1-4, 9-11

Romans 6:3-11

John 20:1-18

HIS VISION - FORGIVENESS

Isaiah 61: 1-2: *¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,*

This is the portion that Jesus reads at the Synagogue in his hometown. And says afterwards "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus tells us the Spirit is on him. In fact, the LORD (Yahweh) has anointed him:

- To proclaim good news to the oppressed,
- To bind up the brokenhearted,
- To proclaim freedom to the captives,
- To proclaim The Year of the Lord's favor,
- To comfort all who mourn.

Forgiven
AND
Free

And we read about Jesus doing these very things throughout his ministry.

But what was this scripture about before it became Jesus' mission statement? It was God's vision for the people of Israel, so they could live together without oppressing each other, and have a method for getting things back to normal. Every 50 years - which is the Biblical Jubilee: As outlined in Leviticus 25, the Land gets a sabbatical every seven years, and at the end of seven seven-year periods, there is the Jubilee. During the Jubilee, which you could think of as a "super sabbatical", land which may have been leased over the intervening years reverts back to ownership by the original family, debts are forgiven, everyone gets a clean slate.

It is unclear if this economic vision of Jubilee was ever actually put into practice, but it is crystal clear that as a vision, it did exist. The vision still holds. Every day, your sins are forgiven; you get a clean slate.

Let us pray: Dear Lord, "To whom can I be a blessing today?" Please use this moment to reach out to someone. There are people all around us who are broken-hearted or in mourning. In need of YOU. In some small way, let us shower Your love on them and bless them with your presence. I know it may only register with them as a random act of kindness, but I trust your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Margay Whitlock

Margay Whitlock is a retired ELCA Pastor who began and ended her ministry at St. John's (Intern September 1993 - August 1994 and Interim November 2016 - April 2018). She is currently retired and lives near Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

April 20 – Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34-43 Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

Luke 24:1-12 John 20:1-18

EASTER IN AUGUST

In 2014 I was blessed with the opportunity to visit the Taizé community in France for a week in August with 14 fellow Lutherans. The Taizé community has a rich history of showing welcome and hospitality to people of all faiths seeking a place to pray, meditate, ask questions and engage with the word of God. There was A LOT I did not know about the community going into my time there, one thing being that they treated each week as if it were Holy Week and Sunday as if it were Easter Sunday. I looked at this tradition a little bit like a summer camp theme, common ground for bonding and group dynamics. Like any good summer camp theme, the week led up to the “grand finale”, fake Easter Sunday.



The week was busy and relaxing at the same time. We had chapel (prayers and chanting) three times a day, some chores, three meals a day, 2 Bible studies a day, and 1 hour of “break” each day. We were encouraged to spend our time outside the above activities in silence, prayer, and other activities that would encourage our spiritual development. There were lots of handouts, prayer prompts and open ended questions. All these things were totally “on theme” with pretending it was Holy Week.

Like any good summer camp theme, fake Easter got me in the end. I woke up Sunday morning and went to the chapel early as one of my jobs was to set out the song and prayer books. When I walked in, the space was the same as it had been all week. There were no flowers, no added candles, no more decorations, just the usual space. I realized I was disappointed because (without thinking about it) I had been getting ready for all the usual signs and wonders of Easter Sunday that I was used to from life at St. John’s. When the service started, the Taizé Brothers started with an “Alleluia” chant that threw me for an immediate loop. It was unexpected, LOUD, BEAUTIFUL, and AMAZING. It was the best thing I had ever heard on an Easter Sunday.

Continued/...

The gospel for Easter Sunday was read in German and French and then we went back to the Alleluia chant, which needed no translation. After the 2nd time through the chant, I heard the gospel in English. I realized how much I had been waiting for and anticipating the familiar words. I savored and repeated the words as we continued chanting Alleluias. It was one of my best Easter Sundays ever, and the only one I've ever celebrated in August.

Easter, whether in Poughkeepsie or France, gets to us. It gets to us because Christ got to us. Easter gets to us because it's the story that tells us who we are and why we have been called into life with Christ. Easter gets to us because it defines our faith and empowers us to live as God has called us to live.

Let us pray: Dear God, thank you for the joy and wonder of this day. Thank you that we have been saved to live and walk with you eternally. Thank you for all the moments where we see this truth, expected and unexpected. Amen.

Abby Triebel



HOLY WEEK

