

Christ Church Episcopal 2019 Lenten Devotions



Reflections by Members and Friends of our Parish Family

Invitation to a Holy Lent

Book of Common Prayer 265

*“I invite you, therefore,
in the name of the Church,
to the observance of a holy Lent,
by self-examination and repentance;
by prayer, fasting, and self-denial;
and by reading and meditating
on God’s holy word.”*

Lent 2019

Dear Friends,

Lent is a wilderness we enter together. Jesus went into the wilderness by himself after his baptism where the temptations the devil offered him forced him to wrestle with the meaning of his identity as the Son of God. We go into the wilderness of Lent to wrestle with the meaning of our identity as children of God and how that identity calls us to live and be in the world. But we do not go alone. We have the Holy Spirit, as did Jesus, but we also have each other. We gather on Sundays throughout this holy season for strength and nourishment. We gather on Wednesday evenings for Evensong and the sip of cool water in the desert of Lent that this service provides. We gather throughout the week in a variety of other ways that nourish us on this journey. This Lenten Reflection booklet allows us to journey through Lent together every day, regardless of whether we are physically together or apart.

There is a wealth of wisdom contained in these pages. Whether from a seven year old, or a person in their ninth decade, and all the ages in between, the wisdom and insights here will nourish our souls and provide manna for the journey as we prepare to welcome the Risen Christ on Easter morning.

Lenten blessings,

Charlotte

March 6, 2019 ~ Ash Wednesday

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and 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 you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Psalm 103 / The Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Pride is a poison that has flowed through the veins of every person that has ever lived. It blinds the eyes of the privileged, deafens the ears of the powerful, and punishes those in need. The prophets saw this and appealed to the people of Israel to rend their hearts and to practice justice (a righting of wrongs), not for their sake. No, Isaiah calls upon the people "to loose the bonds of injustice . . . [and] to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke[.]" So then what does this say to us? Well, it could mean quite a lot of things.

As I have read these words repeatedly, I can proclaim this truth. In the midst of injustice, God's people (and I mean all oppressed people everywhere) are asking for justice. Stand behind marginalized people and realize your place is not up front, but to listen to the prophetic words of those speaking truth to power. This Ash Wednesday is important, and I hope for all of us, as we seek the promise of redemption in Christ's resurrection, that we remember that this promise was not spoken first to those with much, but to those with little. In humility let us reflect on what we must become to pursue the truth the prophets spoke and be willing to learn from those who are not as privileged as we are. For perhaps they understand the message of the gospel more than we ever could.

Brandon George

March 7, 2019 ~ Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Deuteronomy 30:15–20

Psalm 1 / The Gospel: Luke 9:18–25

On a recent flight, I had the odd experience of watching biographies of two Freds, Fred Rogers and Freddie Mercury. “Won’t You Be My Neighbor” versus “Bohemian Rhapsody.” Two subjects couldn’t be more different. Children’s television show “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” as opposed to the rock band Queen. Cardigan and Keds versus skin-tight harlequin romper and ballet slippers. Simple, quiet singing with children versus amplified, flamboyant singing on a stage. Low key, mid-western life-style contrasted with hedonistic international rock star existence. Clean living or alcohol/drug-powered parties. Long life filled with accumulating praises versus life cut short by the deadly ravages of AIDS. Blessings or curses.

The Deuteronomist quotes God addressing Moses and the Hebrews, “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life...” Jesus says much the same thing to the disciples. “Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?”

With Mr. Rogers, it is easy to see that he chose life. His message was “You are loved exactly the way you are.” Freddie Mercury didn’t get that memo until he faced his own mortality. I saw in him a man brought to himself through the unconditional love of his friends. Freddie returned the love to his audiences who sang with him. Maybe Fred and Freddie were not so different.

Janet Daniels

March 8, 2019 ~ Friday after Ash Wednesday

Support us, O Lord, with your gracious favor through the fast we have begun; that as we observe it by bodily self-denial, so we may fulfill it with inner sincerity of heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 58:1–9a

Psalm 51:1-10 / The Gospel: Matthew 9:10–17

Ahh, the meaning, challenge and struggle of “Fasting” as a religious practice. One look at me will tell you immediately that I have not done a lot of fasting in my life. Dieting, yes, with occasional good results, but that’s a different thing altogether. So, what is the difference? From the outside, the discipline of “fasting” is most often expressed by excluding from one’s diet a particularly favored food or beverage for a specified time. Giving up chocolate for Lent, for instance, may look much the same. However, the Biblical notion of “fasting” is much more rightly understood as the humble offering to God of some small sacrifice, a denial of selfish desire for the sake of others: a sacrifice of the heart in gratitude for God’s love. Isaiah warned the people against allowing the outward act of “fasting” (that food thing again) to become a sign of religious superiority. Rather, he wrote, God’s fast is to undo the bonds of injustice, break every yoke, share your bread with the hungry, etc...then your light shall shine. And, in today’s portion of Matthew’s Gospel: Jesus says to the Pharisees who condemned his table fellowship with people considered “unclean” and prided themselves on their piety which included fasting, “Go learn what the scripture means. I desire mercy not sacrifice.” So it is that we pray today that our Lenten Fast, our bodily self-denial, will lead us to inner sincerity of heart and bring us closer to our Lord and His ultimate redeeming sacrifice for us.

Gretchen Green, deacon

March 9, 2019 ~ Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth your right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 58:9b-14

Psalm 86:1-11 / The Gospel: Luke 5:27–32

From my seminary days on, I have been captivated by the tension of lament and the call to generosity. The Psalms are full of pleading for God to look upon suffering while the Old Testament readings admonish us to break chains and remove burdens. In today's readings, these two sentiments come together to reveal a larger picture. Isaiah tells us that by cultivating a spirit of generosity we will be like watered gardens in a parched land. Note that Isaiah does not promise removal from the parched places. Our circumstances may not change, but through generosity, our spirits are lifted and our hearts gladdened—the very things the Psalmist is begging of God.

Some time ago, I saw a video by a woman who provides “parenting truth bombs.” Her videos are funny takes on experiences parents know too well. This one, however, was different. She told the story of her darkest moments living in an apartment she couldn't afford, relying on food banks to feed her children. She explains how she decided to share what little she had with those in her building who were also in desperate situations. This morphed into a weekly meal she shared with the majority of her building and took her from depression to joy. Her circumstances did not immediately change, but she became a watered garden in a parched place.

During this season of Lent, may we practice generosity, be it through meeting physical needs or showing grace to those with whom we disagree.

Sarah Bhatia

March 10, 2019 ~ First Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Romans 10:8b-13
Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 / The Gospel: Luke 4:1-13

Temptations! We've all felt the tug of want and the resistance of reason. But what activates our giving in or our restraint? Perhaps we can gain some insights through the scripture readings for this first Sunday in Lent.

The writer of Deuteronomy instructs the Israelites in a ritual of thanksgiving to God. Will they forget the circumstances of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt? Like children, do they need to be taught to say, "Thank you"? The Israelites are instructed to give God some of the first fruits of the harvest. No farmer can reasonably claim that by his efforts alone, crops grow. Life comes from God. Throughout the Israelites' time in the wilderness, they give in to the temptation to complain: there isn't enough food, it's the wrong kind, they're thirsty, things were better in the past.... God knows their weakness yet remains in relationship with them. The Israelites are learning that God is faithful. When thanks are given, God is to be remembered.

Perhaps our problem with temptation results from confusion over who comes first. Is it God or self? The psalmist recognizes that life goes better when one "abides under the shadow of the Almighty." We can choose to go it alone or we can remember God is with us. Jesus shows us what a wholehearted life of faith in God looks like. Not hunger, nor power nor foolishness will entice him to put his faith elsewhere. Full of the Holy Spirit, he overcomes all the devil's temptations and declares he will worship the Lord God and serve only him. God's strength becomes Jesus' own. Their relationship is reciprocal.

Where does that leave us? The Epistle provides the answer: Faith – faith in God and faith in God's son. We can learn from the Israelites and from Jesus that remembering God is crucial for our wellbeing. Any situation where we are tempted to deny our faith, or our God-given good sense, is a time to remember that God is with us always and we can call on him for strength. *Linda Irving*

March 11, 2019 ~ Monday in the 1st week of Lent

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully increase in us your gifts of holy discipline, in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; that our lives may be directed to the fulfilling of your most gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Leviticus 19:1–2,11–18

Psalm 19:7-14 / The Gospel: Matthew 25:31–46

Today's Old Testament lesson from Leviticus ends with these words: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." The Gospel is the parable of the king who tells his followers, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me." These words prompted me to find the "Golden Rule" as it is set forth in world religions.

CHRISTIANITY So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12

CONFUCIANISM Do not do to others what you would not like yourself.

BUDDHISM Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.

HINDUISM Do naught unto others what you would not have them do unto you.

ISLAM No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.

JUDAISM What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman.

TAOISM Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

ZOROASTRIANISM That nature alone is good which refrains from doing to another whatsoever is not good for itself.

Throughout the world, for many centuries, this precept has been the "Gold Standard" for how to conduct one's life. What a world it would be if all followed it!

Eileen Gaston

March 12, 2019 ~ Tuesday in the 1st week of Lent

Grant to your people, Lord, grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only true God; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 55:6–11

Psalm 34:15-22 / The Gospel: Matthew 6:7–15

In today's gospel, Jesus teaches us how to pray. Praying the Our Father during Lent, my attention goes especially to the part about forgiveness.

My childhood understanding of Lent centered on being sorry, and on being forgiven. Now, I think I am understanding that making the effort during Lent (and anytime) to forgive others is just as important — forgiving and being forgiven come hand in hand.

It's a lot of work forgiving. It's work that is worth doing. Like taking a cleaning rag to wipe off the darkness that is crusted onto the windows of our soul, little by little, we work on forgiving, wiping our brokenheartedness away. As we keep working on this, it seems to me we will also be forgiven by our heavenly Father. We allow the bright, clean, white light of love to shine through the windows of our soul more and more.

In the Psalm today, "The Lord is near the brokenhearted and will save those whose spirits are crushed." The reading from Isaiah talks about returning "... to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." God wants to be with us through our journey to forgive, and is ready and waiting to forgive us, too! Let's pray the Our Father, and open our hearts to the gifts of these words—inviting us to forgive AND helping us find our way to being forgiven and being made whole.

Lori Metoki

March 13, 2019 ~ Wednesday in the 1st week of Lent

Bless us, O God, in this holy season, in which our hearts seek your help and healing; and so purify us by your discipline that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jonah 3:1–10

Psalm 51:11-18 / The Gospel: Luke 11:29–32

Study of human development has discovered that punishment does not teach. Discipline means to teach. A four-year-old child sitting in time out for four minutes will respond with anger if he/she believes they are being punished and spend the time feeling angry. A child who understands the time out is to teach and make their life better thinks about the lesson. "Mommy loves you so much that she will give time outs to you so that you learn to keep your hands to yourself. Mommy knows that you need this to be happy."

In Jonah's time when the awesome freedom of individual choice was generally subsumed into group need, identity and connection, the people of Nineveh could share the absolute knowledge of what life would be without the benevolence of God. They could join to repent and to learn. "All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands." They trusted they were in God's hands and could act in faith alone.

A simple, clear story to remind us of our need for God and the blessing of correction.

Martie Hall

March 14, 2019 ~ Thursday in the 1st week of Lent

Strengthen us, O Lord, by your grace, that in your might we may overcome all spiritual enemies, and with pure hearts serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Esther (Apocrypha) 14:1–6,12–14

Psalm 138 / The Gospel: Matthew 7:7–12

“Ask and it will be given you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.” I think this means that if you ask for God you will receive God, search for God and you will find God, knock on the door to Heaven and the door to Heaven will be opened for you.

“Is there anyone among you who if a child asks for bread will give a stone?” I think this means that you give your children good gifts, not meaning candy, or money, or toys, although we would like that. It means good gifts by love, support, and friendship.

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” I think this is saying, treat others the way you want to be treated. If you asked your child for a fish, and he gave you a snake, would you like that? That is why you don't give him a snake when he asks for fish.

Anna Barger

March 15, 2019 ~ Friday in the 1st week of Lent

Lord Christ, our eternal Redeemer, grant us such fellowship in your sufferings, that, filled with your Holy Spirit, we may subdue the flesh to the spirit, and the spirit to you, and at the last attain to the glory of your resurrection; who lives and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Ezekiel 18:21–28

Psalm 130 / The Gospel: Matthew 5:20–26

These readings make me think of the many Prison Ministries that are around. I have never really participated in any, except for baking brownies to be shared. But I can imagine that this reading must offer so much hope to prisoners, and all of us, that we can change and be redeemed. Recently, in the State of the Union address, two former prisoners were introduced who had been pardoned because of the changes in their lives; they were in Bible Studies, and brought other people into Bible Studies, and modeled exemplary lives for a number of years. Passages like this must have given them so much hope. And this Psalm: its verses speak of God's mercy and forgiveness, what a comfort. In the Gospel reading, we are told if we have a brother or sister who has something against us, go and be reconciled. I can attest that this is not easy to do. I have a former friend that will have nothing to do with me, for reasons that are not clear to me. I believe it to be a misunderstanding, and I have tried to apologize, yet I don't know what I've done. It pains me; however, Christian friends that I have confided in have told me it is her and not me and to forget it. But, verses like this appear before my eyes and I am frustrated. I can only give it to God and have him work it out.

Sue Addison King

March 16, 2019 ~ Saturday in the 1st week of Lent

O God, by your Word you marvelously carry out the work of reconciliation: Grant that in our Lenten fast we may be devoted to you with all our hearts, and united with one another in prayer and holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Deuteronomy 26:16–19

Psalm 119:1-8 / The Gospel: Matthew 5:43–48

Both the Hebrew Bible reading for today from Deuteronomy (26:16-19) and the Gospel reading in Matthew (5:43-48) for this day in Lent remind us how inconvenient being a practicing Christian is. Deuteronomy tells us to keep God's laws, and Matthew tells us that one of those laws is to "love your neighbor as your enemy" for God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good." In these troubled political times when we as a nation are divided perhaps as we have not been since the Civil War, it is easy for us to indulge our worst instincts and think of the other side as embodying the worst of humanity. This is particularly true if we, for whatever reasons, believe we are the targets of the other side. But no: we must follow both God's law of loving our enemies and Michelle Obama's dictum, "When they go low, we go high." We must take the high road of God's love and God's law. Never ever forget that those who may see us as the other side and whom we see as the other side are our brothers and sisters in humanity. We are all children of God, and we must love our siblings, regardless how they feel about us. As Frankie says in the novel, *The Member of the Wedding*, of her family, "They are the we of me." Today, our lessons send that lesson home, big time.

Thomas Dukes

March 17, 2019 ~ Second Sunday in Lent

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Psalm 27 / The Gospel: Luke 13:31-35

Growing up in a church that was non-liturgical, Lent was always a bit of a mystery for me. My Catholic classmates would mention fasting, which usually involved giving up sugar, but that was all I knew about the season. Considering that my birthday always falls in the middle of Lent, refraining from sugar was a practice I could never get behind. Therefore, I discarded Lent as a time of meaningless deprivation. It wasn't until I began my studies at Princeton Theological Seminary that I learned the full depth and richness of Lent. It then became a time of focused spiritual reflection and practice.

The Psalms are where I usually find myself returning for reflection during this season. In them, I find the echo of my own heart and soul; the tension of faith and doubt. Psalm 27 captures this sentiment well. Though danger lurks on every side, God will not forsake God's own. Whom shall I fear? The Psalmist lives in this tension waiting for the end of suffering. The time of darkness is lightened by the hope and expectation of the promise fulfilled. This is what Lent has become for me. Living in between faith and doubt, waiting in the hope of resurrection, while still feeling the pain of suffering and death. The Psalms remind us it is okay to feel the sorrow, to doubt, to lament, but our lament is always tempered by faith in the Resurrected One who will not hide his face from us.

Sarah Bhatia

March 18, 2019 ~ Monday in the 2nd week of Lent

Let your Spirit, O Lord, come into the midst of us to wash us with the pure water of repentance, and prepare us to be always a living sacrifice to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Daniel 9:3–10

Psalm 79:1–9 / The Gospel: Luke 6:27-38

Jesus taught by modeling how we should live, but also provided short, impactful statements that summarized the core essence of his living example. Today's Gospel contains the most meaningful, yet challenging, statement for me. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." 'Do' underscores that we were created to actively interact with the world, to effect change, including changes in ourselves. 'Unto others' has become more complex and challenging. When I was younger, 'others' meant mostly people I had personal contact with. There were many, and sometimes those exchanges were fraught with conflict. But now my perceptual world has changed. Media, search engines, social media all allow me to immerse myself in the lives, including the ordeals, of people whom I will never meet. They are not just vague stories in a newspaper; I can see and watch them in real time. 'As you would have them do unto you.' I greatly benefited from generous help given by people I knew well, and at times from people I had met only once. The most useful was assistance that taught and gave me an opportunity to help myself.

I have had some successes in living up to the challenge in this sentence; I chose a career that allowed me to help many of the 'least of these' others help themselves. And I have had many failures, often with providing emotional support to those closest to me. Today I am challenged as I watch in real time media so many, around the world, who need so much, including young children who cannot be merely taught to do for themselves; their plight is too dire and immediate. I have acquired modest wealth, and hope to leave much of it to my children, who have already benefited from relatively privileged lives. But the challenge remains, what would Jesus 'do'?

Dick McCormick

March 19, 2019 ~ Tuesday in the 2nd week of Lent

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

2 Samuel 7:4,8-16

Romans 4:13-18

Psalm 89:1-29 or 89:1-4, 26-29 / The Gospel: Luke 2:41-52

I've been struggling lately with the mystery of Jesus, "who is fully God and fully man," according to what we believe. As I read his words in scripture sometimes, I wonder who is speaking in the person of Jesus ... is it God or man? And when did the person of Jesus know that he was the Son of God? Even though Jesus the Word of God knew it, the person of Jesus couldn't know it until Jesus the man realized it. According to today's Gospel reading, he knew it by the time he was twelve. "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" he asks. Here is Jesus, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." It strikes me that, in a way, Jesus is preparing for his bar mitzvah – studying Jewish law, tradition and ethics – a young man preparing to take responsibility for his own actions. And this scripture assures us that "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." "This is my Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Len Harrison

March 20, 2019 ~ Wednesday in the 2nd week of Lent

O God, you so loved the world that you gave your only- begotten Son to reconcile earth with heaven: Grant that we, loving you above all things, may love our friends in you, and our enemies for your sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jeremiah 18:1–11,18–20

Psalm 31:9–16 / The Gospel: Matthew 20:17–28

God creates us for a purpose; it could be many purposes. Wow! But how do we find out what that purpose is? And could we satisfy many purposes? If we (as individuals or nations) turn from evil, seek His purpose and direction, God will look favorably on us; but if we persist in pursuing our own ends, out of sync with God, life will become more and more difficult. Here is something really amazing. Throughout all scripture, God pleads with us to avoid evil and sin. The reality is, evil and sin are just not good for us. And He gives us a simple way to get back on the track: repent, ask for forgiveness, and work hard to stay right with God.

As I write this at this stage in my life, I really praise God that I am not in the depths of despair described in the 9th through the 13th verses of Psalm 31. But those last three verses can easily be a prayer. Just think of it, here I am over 2,000 years removed from the psalmist's writing and prayer to God, and it is as good for me as it was for him. Doesn't this speak of an eternal God, as fresh today as when He created the universe?

Larry King

March 21, 2019 ~ Thursday in the 2nd week of Lent

O Lord, strong and mighty, Lord of hosts and King of glory: Cleanse our hearts from sin, keep our hands pure, and turn our minds from what is passing away; so that at the last we may stand in your holy place and receive your blessing; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jeremiah 17:5–10

Psalm 1 / The Gospel: Luke 16:19–31

My first mentor, an Episcopal priest, told me the law of God cannot be broken. It is as certain as gravity. We can only break ourselves against the law.

Jeremiah wants "mere" mortals who rely on mortals instead of God. They will not see relief "when it comes." They will live in "parched places of wilderness." We each face wilderness at the loss of a job, mate, child, health. Change is certain. Having a faith to hold for each step we take in the dark brings us closer to God and more able to meet God's desires for us.

"I the Lord test the mind and search the heart to give all according to their ways." The thesaurus says accordance is a manner agreeing with, conforming to, compliant, consistent, harmonious, appropriate. The dictionary says "as claimed by the authority of knowledge."

We are powerless over the stories our lives will bring to us. But we are told our God has love and also respect for us. He is always with and within us but we have the power to choose to receive Him or to deny. C. S. Lewis says we are all made with a hole inside to make space for God. He says we need to be very careful how we fill that hole.

Martie Hall

March 22, 2019 ~ Friday in the 2nd week of Lent

Grant, O Lord, that as your Son Jesus Christ prayed for his enemies on the cross, so we may have grace to forgive those who wrongfully or scornfully use us, that we ourselves may be able to receive your forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Genesis 37:3–4,12–28

Psalm 105:16–22 / The Gospel: Matthew 21:33–43

The Genesis passage talks about belittling someone. We all have people in our lives that we envy. We live in a world that continually compares people for self-satisfaction. “That new iPhone is so cool looking and it makes my previous model look old and worthless. I should just get rid of my old one.” If we are not careful, we can do the same thing to other humans, wishing ill-will on others so we can look superior.

Belittling can be infectious, as we see on a school playground. The cool kid says that another kid is not cool, so he or she persuades the other kids to belittle someone. We forget so easily that we all are built the same way, walk the same way, and eat the same way. One human in the eye of God is not better than the other one. We are all equal in God’s eyes. However, our human jealousy clouds that truth.

I still find inspiration from the sermon Gene Robinson gave at Matthew Shepherd’s Celebration of Life and Internment. He said, “I have a magnet on my refrigerator that says ‘Jesus loves you, but I’m his favorite.’ Here’s the miracle. Every one of you is God’s favorite.” Every time I try to compare myself to another person for my own satisfaction, I remember these words. God loves you just the way you are and nothing can change that, no matter how lost you may think you are.

Mario Buchanan

March 23, 2019 ~ Saturday in the 2nd week of Lent

Grant, most merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Micah 7:14–15,18–20

Psalm 103:1–4(5–8)9–12 / The Gospel: Luke 15:11–32

This Saturday in the Second Week of Lent is all about forgiveness. As in Micah, God will pardon our iniquity. According to Psalm 103, “As far as the east is from the west so far has He removed our sins from us.” The Gospel is the story of the Prodigal Son.

In Micah it says God delights in showing clemency just as the father did to the younger son in Luke 15. I believe in forgiving others as the lord forgives us. As Jesus says at the end of Luke, “Forgive them, they know not what they do.”

I have my own Prodigal Son story. My brother and his wife both went down a path of dissolute living. Both are now sober and have been for over 30 years. I know my brother stopped drinking at the age when he was old enough to start and has been sober for 37 years and still going. The party which was given for them was their wedding reception. At their wedding the Gospel read was The Prodigal Son. The Serenity Prayer in full was offered up.

The reception was at a prestigious Country Club in Akron complete with the “fatted calf” and much dancing and celebrating. I never felt like the older brother. I knew that I had my parents’ love and what was theirs was mine to the extent that it could be.

I did the Reconciliation of a Penitent with Charlotte a while ago. I believe my sins have been forgiven. My transgressions no longer nag at me as they used to. God is merciful.

Susie Spearman

March 24, 2019 ~ Third Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exodus 3:1-15

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Psalm 63:1-8 / The Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

Blaze in a bramble

I light a candle where once eyes closed the Spirit
Fluttered. When opened it disappeared.
A flame flickered on my sunlit altar.

Moses turned to gaze at a flame that did not
Consume. A voice came from the blaze in a bramble.
The place where you stand is holy ground.

A blinding flash on the way to Damascus,
A flutter and a shimmer on ripples in the Jordan,
A column of fire in the wilderness night,
A blaze in a bramble on Mt. Horeb,
and with each a voice.

The first work of creation is, Let there be
Light. Before the light is a voice.

I Will Be Who I Will Be. I am with you.

I light a candle.

Don Collins Reed

March 25, 2019 ~ Monday in the 3rd week of Lent

The Annunciation - Pour your grace into our hearts, O Lord, that we who have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ, announced by an angel to the Virgin Mary, may by his cross and passion be brought to the glory of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 7:10-14

Hebrews 10:4-10

Psalms 45 or 40:5-11 or Canticle 15 / The Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

In the 13th Century, Meister Eckhart wrote: We are all meant to be mothers of God. ... What good is it to me, he said, if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? And what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace and if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to His Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture?

And Madeleine L'Engle wrote: It is only after we have been enabled to say, "Be it unto me according to your Word," that we can accept the paradoxes of Christianity. Christ comes to live with us, bringing an incredible promise of God's love, but never are we promised that there will be no pain, no suffering, no death, but rather that these very griefs are the road to love and eternal life.

Mary's story serves as a model for all who have been called to make possible God's becoming incarnate in whatever part of the world is our own Nazareth. It lets us know that in the midst of Lent there is hope for new birth and renewal, that there will be more opportunity to enter into partnership with God in the process of re-creation and reconciliation. "Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

Allan Belton

March 26, 2019 ~ Tuesday in the 3rd week of Lent

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom you have given a fervent desire to pray, may, by your mighty aid, be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Song of the Three Young Men 2–4,11–20a

Psalm 25:3–10 / The Gospel: Matthew 18:21–35

My best friend and next door neighbor, Susie, could never play on Saturday mornings until she had gone to confession. Having gone to church with her a few times, I was familiar with the small wooden rooms where Susie and her four sisters met with their priest, but I wondered what exactly went on in there. “Well,” she said, “I have to tell him every time I fight with Nancy or forget, on purpose, to make my bed in the morning.” And then what happens? “Jesus was so good when he was on earth that he left behind all the forgiveness he didn’t need for the priest to give away on Saturday. So I get some of that.” But what happens when it runs out? “Don’t you know? It never runs out!”

I asked my mother if our minister could give me some of that forgiveness. “Say your prayers and say you’re sorry, and you’ll be just fine,” she said. Good advice (if not always easy), but I think my friend, Susie, and her take on forgiveness, made a bigger impression on me. Just imagine! God’s forgiveness never runs out! Seven times or 77 times, God wants us to forgive each other. And on Saturday mornings and every other day of the week, no matter how large or small our debt, God is ready to give some of that forgiveness to each of us.

Pam Zuhl

March 27, 2019 ~ Wednesday in the 3rd week of Lent

Give ear to our prayers, O Lord, and direct the way of your servants in safety under your protection, that, amid all the changes of our earthly pilgrimage, we may be guarded by your mighty aid; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Deuteronomy 4:1–2,5–9

Psalm 78:1–6 / The Gospel: Matthew 5:17–19

The psalm appointed for this day sounds a lot like a parent talking to a child. The psalmist has something very important to say, as if he is imparting wisdom to the people. “That which we have heard and known, and what our forefathers have told us, we will not hide from their children” (verse 1) speaks of telling stories to the younger generation. Stories are to be told, even the bad ones.

I am reminded of my studies in school as a music major. When you have an instructor, you want to learn all of their tricks and tips. Every week, I would bring a piece of music I was learning to my organ teacher, Valerie Thorson, and she would tell me where the problem spots are and how to fix them. To this day, I still call her asking for advice on how to play a tricky passage or how to practice a piece, because I know that she has such a vast knowledge of experience to help. “I will open my mouth in a parable” (verse 2). We still use parables today, but we call them analogies. Music teaching is riddled with analogies and imagery to get a point across. This psalm is quite full of advice for our daily lives.

Share your life experience with others so they can learn from you.

Mario Buchanan

March 28, 2019 ~ Thursday in the 3rd week of Lent

Keep watch over your Church, O Lord, with your unfailing love; and, since it is grounded in human weakness and cannot maintain itself without your aid, protect it from all danger, and keep it in the way of salvation; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jeremiah 7:23–28

Psalm 95:6–11 / The Gospel: Luke 11:14–23

I have always been amused by Jeremiah referring to the people as those who “...stiffened their necks.” As a teacher, I have experienced some students who stiffened their necks, both high school students and preschoolers. Shamus comes to mind. He was only three years old, but he had already been expelled from one preschool class. Shamus was so naughty. If there was a loud wail from someplace in the room, Shamus the guilty was scrambling under the table. I scrambled right under with him and pulled him out. He would wail at being caught, but I would hold him and talk to him and try to get him to see the error of his ways. Shamus eventually un-stiffened his neck and became a delightful and cooperative little boy in class. And this is what is going on in this reading. “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.” That sounds like an invitation too good to be true. But, Sue King has the same invitation, and she can be so slack sometimes. She can make vows, promises, and resolutions, and mean it from her heart; but an easier route presents itself, she stiffens her neck and off she goes. But, thank God, we get the invitation over and over again. And, as the Psalmist says, “For He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.”

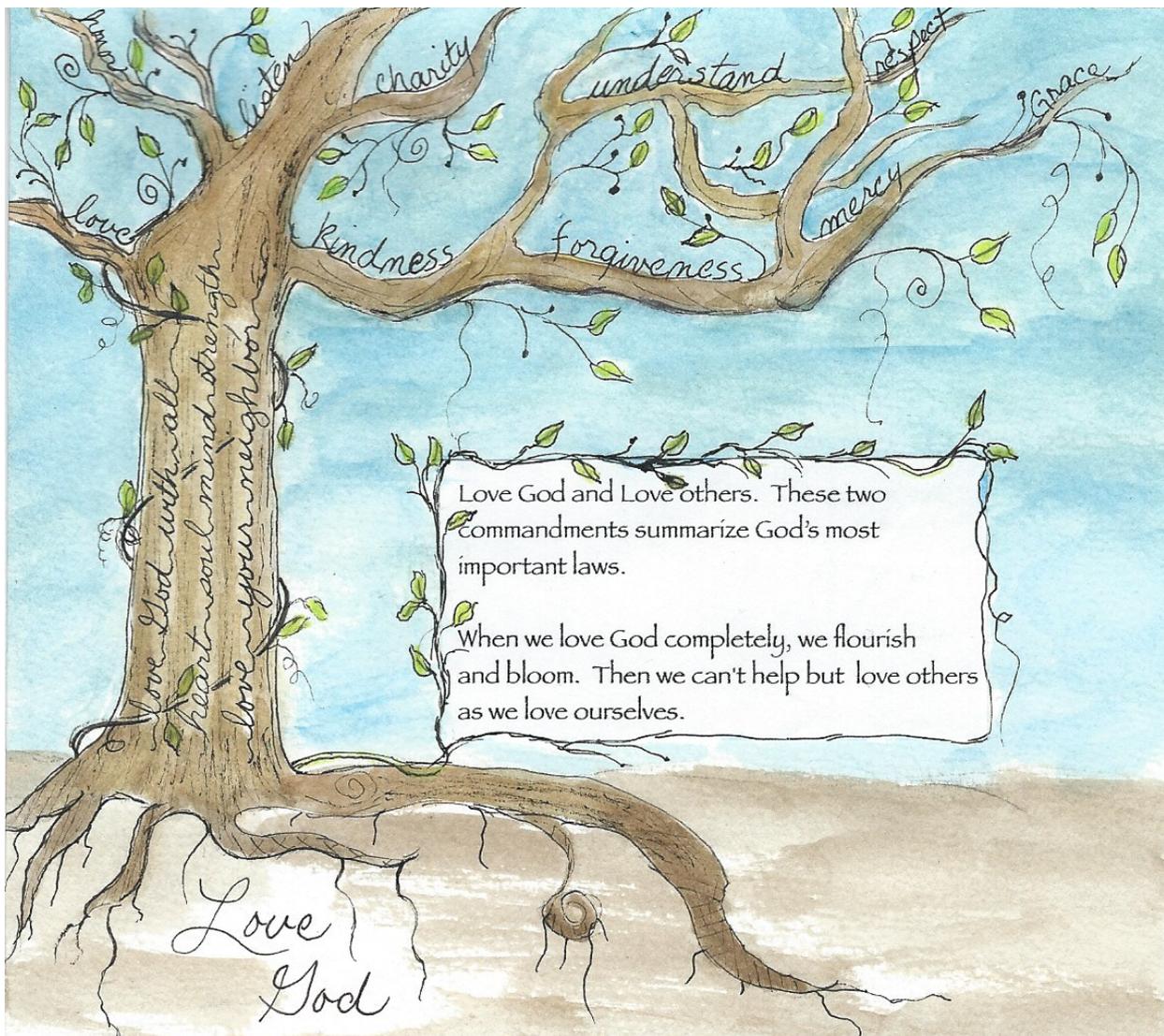
Sue Addison King

March 29, 2019 ~ Friday in the 3rd week of Lent

Grant us, O Lord our Strength, a true love of your holy Name; so that, trusting in your grace, we may fear no earthly evil, nor fix our hearts on earthly goods, but may rejoice in your full salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hosea 14:1–9

Psalm 81:8–14 / The Gospel: Mark 12:28–34



Jane Harrison

March 30, 2019 ~ Saturday in 3rd week of Lent

O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hosea 6:1–6

Psalm 51:15–20 / The Gospel: Luke 18:9-14

I am admitting this in a safe place... I like tests. I know that makes me weird. I have taken a lot of them, and I have typically performed well. I feel great when I get a good grade. Test preparation often infuses my approach to life. I like to know what the grading criteria are for a task, and I organize my efforts to meet those objectives.

In today's Gospel reading, I am all too frequently the Pharisee in the Temple. I can easily find myself listing all the things that I am doing that are "right" and thinking that I am getting a good grade on God's "life test." I praise myself for my efforts and success. I am at the center of the story.

But I am failing when I place myself at the center. God enters the hearts of those who truly believe that they can't do it all themselves. He comes to those who understand that even when we feel strong and in control, ultimately, we are all frail. A sudden illness or accident involving a loved one is a jolting reminder of how true this is. Filling ourselves with self-talk of our good performance leaves no space for God to enter our hearts.

The real test is to honestly and humbly admit we need help, God's help, to truly experience the joys that life has to offer. It's not an easy test. It may be simple, but often it is not easy.

Fritz Kass

March 31, 2019 ~ Fourth Sunday in Lent

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Joshua 5:9-12

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Psalm 32 / The Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32



Anna Ribovich

April 1, 2019 ~ Monday in the 4th week of Lent

O Lord our God, in your holy Sacraments you have given us a foretaste of the good things of your kingdom: Direct us, we pray, in the way that leads to eternal life, that we may come to appear before you in that place of light where you dwell for ever with your saints; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 65:17–25

Psalm 30:1–6,11–13 / The Gospel: John 4:43–54

I love my Christian faith. I admire Buddhism and work to learn detachment as they assert attachment is the source of all suffering. Jesus taught us this as well. "Your life is like a blade of grass."

But our story is deeply involved in the painful human struggle living in a painful world. Jesus was born an infant and raised, completely dependent on loving imperfect human parents. He died an agonizing death on the cross: shamed, ridiculed and hated. Job argued with God. Feeling punished and forsaken, he asks why? What is fair? The story ends, of course, with God questioning him. "Did you create the mountains?" Awed acceptance of his powerlessness and detachment from his own understanding allowed space for God's love, creating faith, hope, gratitude, peace and joy.

Isaiah says, "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth... be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating..." "For like the days of the tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen will long enjoy the work of their hands." We are asked to surrender to God but also promised a wonderful outcome. Amazing.

In "The Hidden Life of Trees," Peter Wohlleben shares that trees are social networks. Parents live with their children, communicate and support each other, share nutrients with those sick and suffering.

I picture Martha Ann being tucked into bed by a parent after a "terrible, horrible, no good day." She failed to do her homework and was shamed by the teacher. Her best friend stomped on her foot, along with rain and wind and TV news. Her loving parent is moved to compassion, shares her suffering with kindness and gentleness and encouragement that all will be well. All the while knowing that tomorrow is another day.

"The wolf and the lamb shall feed together."

Martie Hall

April 2, 2019 ~ Tuesday in the 4th week of Lent

*O God, with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light:
Quench our thirst with living water, and flood our darkened minds
with heavenly light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and
reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Ezekiel 47:1–9,12

Psalm 46:1-8 / The Gospel: John 5:1-18



Linda Irving

April 3, 2019 ~ Wednesday in the 4th week of Lent

O Lord our God, you sustained your ancient people in the wilderness with bread from heaven: Feed now your pilgrim flock with the food that endures to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 49:8–15

Psalm 145:8–19 / The Gospel: John 5:19-29

The son can do nothing on his own, but can follow the example of the father. This is what Jesus tells those following him as a display or example of how he gains his ability from God. Of all the examples Jesus gives, this is one of the more human and more earthly. What child doesn't imitate the actions of their parent? What child doesn't seek an example of how to live from their parent as they walk through life? Even into adulthood, this looking for example doesn't disappear.

As we walk through life we also learn that, like all people, our parents are imperfect. Our parents can forget. They can lose the air of "super" which many children give to parents. They can do wrong and be in need of redemption. They can seek God and seek an example as much as anyone else.

Today, ask what you need to learn. Ask what example you need to follow. Ask how you can do good with the power of God in you.

Allie Heeter

April 4, 2019 ~ Thursday in the 4th week of Lent

Almighty and most merciful God, drive from us all weakness of body, mind, and spirit; that, being restored to wholeness, we may with free hearts become what you intend us to be and accomplish what you want us to do; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exodus 32:7–14

Psalm 106:6–7,19–23 / The Gospel: John 5:30–47

My interpretation of this Collect is to request the assistance of GOD to remove all personal weakness of body, mind, and spirit. Being unshackled from any weakness, we would be able to accomplish whatever GOD intended us to accomplish. Whether GOD truly has a grand plan for each one of us might be in question, but at least by gathering together as faithful church members we would be more likely to support one another to become the best and most fulfilled individuals we could become. Amen

William A. Currin

April 5, 2019 ~ Friday in the 4th week of Lent

O God, you have given us the Good News of your abounding love in your Son Jesus Christ: So fill our hearts with thankfulness that we may rejoice to proclaim the good tidings we have received; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wisdom 2:1a,12–24

Psalm 34:15–22 / The Gospel: John 7:1–2,10,25–30

You may not see a connection between the Collect and the Gospel today, but here's an interesting idea that I have and a little history lesson to go with it. In the Gospel reading, what is the “Festival of Booths” that Jesus attended secretly? It is the Feast of the Tabernacles, or Sukkot in Hebrew. The Jews celebrate and give thanks to God for a bountiful harvest at the end of the growing season in makeshift tents of palms, remembering how they lived when they fled Egypt. Does this festival which appears in the Old Testament in Leviticus 23:39 to 23:43 seem familiar to you? It is likely that Thanksgiving’s roots came from it because the Puritans lived with Jews in Holland before being delivered to the New World for religious freedom. There are many similarities between the two feasts, including the deliverance from religious persecution.

It seems ironic that the Jews were searching for Jesus to persecute him, while they celebrated and thanked God for their own deliverance and abundance. Jesus cried out to the Jews in the temple that they didn't know God. If they had just listened to their God, and given Jesus religious freedom as well, our Christian story might be different. Even though Jesus was crucified, we can still give thanks, as the Collect states, for the the life of Jesus and the lessons we have learned by sharing them with others so we may do what is good and right.

Heather Swift

April 6, 2019 ~ Saturday in the 4th week of Lent

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

Jeremiah 11:18–20

Psalm 7:6–11 / The Gospel: John 7:37–52

I have often been fascinated by the changes in perceptions created by optical illusions. Mostly we see what we expect and accept that as reality. It takes some effort to see the same work in a new way. Hudson artist, Peter McDonald, gave our town such a creation before he died. As you drive, bike or even walk along Veteran's Way, you will see a replica of our Clock Tower. As you pass by, the tower will appear to rotate. Our eyes are fooled. We cannot help it. I once walked up to it from the rear just to be sure, and, guess what, it is simply two panels of steel set at an angle to one another and painted in a particular way. Nothing moves. That is the truth of it, yet the illusion is very strong.

Jesus' journey toward execution takes one more inevitable step when he says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" These words flew in the face of established Messianic expectations. Yet, many people listening to him are encouraged and amazed. With these words, he reinforces a dangerous anti-establishment movement which threatens the status quo, and the authorities cannot acknowledge it as coming from God. They say, there will be no prophet, and surely not the Messiah, coming from Galilee. What do we say?

Gretchen Green

April 7, 2019 ~ Fifth Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:4b-14

Psalms 126 / The Gospel: John 12:1-8

“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”
(Isaiah 43:19)

In this passage from Isaiah, God promises the people that God is about to do something so new and amazing that the people will forget God’s previous mighty deeds. God’s question to the people and to us is: “Do you not perceive it?”

The people to whom Isaiah writes were in the wilderness of exile, separated from the Promised Land which had been burned and ransacked. What new thing could God possibly do in the midst of their devastating loss?

We find ourselves in the wilderness of Lent, a time of self-reflection, self-discipline, and penitence. We have chosen to enter the Lenten wilderness in order to prepare ourselves for Easter and God’s mighty act of resurrection. We also find ourselves in wildernesses not of our own choosing. We find ourselves in the wilderness of pain and grief, fear and frustration, longing for the laughter and joy that the psalmist speaks of.

In the midst of the wilderness, God challenges us to look at life expecting to see something new, expecting to see the unexpected. God’s promise to us is that God is doing something new in our midst and that, in time, “those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy.”

Charlotte Collins Reed

April 8, 2019 ~ Monday in the 5th week of Lent

Be gracious to your people, we entreat you, O Lord, that they, repenting day by day of the things that displease you, may be more and more filled with love of you and of your commandments; and, being supported by your grace in this life, may come to the full enjoyment of eternal life in your everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Susanna [1–9,15–29,34–40],41-62
Psalm 23 / The Gospel: John 8:1–11 or 12-20

The psalm for today is #23, perhaps the best-known and most beloved reading in the entire Old Testament. Years ago, in a time of tragedy, we were given a copy of *The Lord Is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom of the Twenty-Third Psalm* by Harold S. Kushner. He is the rabbi/author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

Here are a few gleanings from his short and inspirational book:

“The primary message of the Twenty-third Psalm is not that bad things will never happen to us. It is that we will not have to face these bad things alone, ‘for Thou art with me.’”

“There are times when the shadow that death casts over our lives is not the prospect of our own death but the death of people close to us....To love someone is to make yourself vulnerable... God shares the pain of death to dilute it and make it less painful.”

“The key to surviving misfortune is the realization that, when bad things happen, God is on our side. The illness, the accident are not God’s will. When we choose to affirm life in the face of loss, to affirm goodness in the face of evil, we are on God’s side.”

“The remarkable thing about gratitude is that, like forgiveness, it is a favor we do ourselves more than it is something we do for the recipient of our thanks. “

“Patience with people is love; patience with God is faith.”

Amen.

Eileen Gaston

April 9, 2019 ~ Tuesday in the 5th week of Lent

Almighty God, through the incarnate Word you have caused us to be born anew of an imperishable and eternal seed: Look with compassion upon those who are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant that they may be built as living stones into a spiritual temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Numbers 21:4–9

Psalm 102:15–22 / The Gospel: John 8:21–30

Yikes! What put God over the edge in today's passage from Numbers? The Hebrew people have been complaining about the terms and conditions of their release from Egypt ever since they entered the wilderness. God has been patient up until this morning, providing water to quench the people's thirst and manna to assuage their hunger. Now God is fed up and sends poisonous serpents to bite the people and kill them. I'd like to know where the people crossed the line with God so I can make sure I stay far, far away from that line!

I believe that is the wrong question to ask of this passage. Our call as Christians is not to figure out where God's line in the sand is so we can stay far from that place. In this passage, God takes an agent of death (the poisonous serpent) and turns it into an agent of life. In the crucifixion, which is alluded to in the gospel reading for today, God takes an agent of death, the cross, and transforms it into an agent of eternal life.

Our call as people of God is to recognize the agents of death in our own lives, those things that draw us from God, and allow God to transform them into agents of life. That transformation is not always easy or painless. But God's transformation always brings life.

Charlotte Collins Reed

April 10, 2019 ~ Wednesday in the 5th week of Lent

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

Daniel 3:14–20,24–28

Canticle 13 / The Gospel: John 8:31–42

These readings and the collect spoke to me in three ways that impact my walk with the living Christ: 1) How do I serve God? When—and if—I even think about serving God, is it with a joyful heart and servant spirit? What an incredible thought: I, the merest of mortals, have been given the opportunity to serve the God of all creation. It's overwhelming, really. 2) In Daniel we meet three true servants up against it: deny God or face a fiery extinction. They don't hesitate—no ifs, ands, or buts; they are all in: either God is the one true God or not. No half hearted commitment, no negotiations. Can I or do I have that strength of belief? How do I stand up against the fake gods of false opinions, cultural aberrations, and now—even more and more—attacks against the basic beliefs of Christianity and the Savior who died for us. Do I stand up for God or remain silent so as not to be judged a “troublemaker”? 3) And then Jesus takes on the Establishment and uses strong words. This is not a wimpy, mamby-pamby, soft, weak and apologetic Savior; this is God fighting for our souls. Do we stand with Jesus and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? How do we serve God and live up to our baptism—which says we will “resist evil”?

Larry King

April 11, 2019 ~ Thursday in the 5th week of Lent

O God, you have called us to be your children, and have promised that those who suffer with Christ will be heirs with him of your glory: Arm us with such trust in him that we may ask no rest from his demands and have no fear in his service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Genesis 17:1–8

Psalm 105:4–11 / The Gospel: John 8:51–59



Lauren Ribovich

April 12, 2019 ~ Friday in the 5th week of Lent

O Lord, you relieve our necessity out of the abundance of your great riches: Grant that we may accept with joy the salvation you bestow, and manifest it to all the world by the quality of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Jeremiah 20:7–13

Psalm 18:1–7 / The Gospel: John 10:31–42

When one reads the lessons for today, it can be hard to remember that both Jeremiah and Jesus began their work on God's behalf with some incredibly encouraging words. At the time of his call, Jeremiah discovered that God had had an eye on him from the time he was born. Never mind that he felt that he was an inarticulate youngster, God would be there to encourage him and guide him. He had to discover that what God would ask him to do would get him in a lot of trouble and nearly cost him his life. No wonder that in the passage for today, one can get the sense that there were times when Jeremiah felt manipulated by God, and angry with God, for all that doing God's work has cost him.

For Jesus the encouragement came with the words, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Lk. 3:22) Those words were echoed in the Gospel reading just before Lent began. It was on the mountain that there came the words, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Lk. 9:35) Apparently, the crowd we read about in this tenth chapter of John was not aware of those words, and, in fact, when Jesus claimed his sonship, many in the crowd accused him of blasphemy and wanted to stone him.

However, what we know from the last verses of this passage from Jeremiah and from the rest of Jesus' ministry is that, ultimately, both men, regardless of how challenging their calling became, never felt abandoned by the God who called them, the God whose Spirit always sustained them.

Perhaps not as dramatically as Jeremiah or Jesus, we, too, have been called by God for some kind of ministry of service, some ministry in the name of God's Kingdom. And like the two of them we live in a world that is often hostile to the message we bare and the ministry that we seek to carry out. So, at those times when we might be feeling overwhelmed and abandoned, it might be well to remember these words written by a man named Merv Rosell: God could have kept Daniel out of the lion's den.... He could have kept Paul and Silas out of jail. He could have kept the three holy children out of the fiery furnace.... But God has never promised to keep us out of hard places. What God has promised is to go with us through every hard place and to bring us through victoriously.

Allan Belton

April 13, 2019 ~ Saturday in the 5th week of Lent

O Lord, in your goodness you bestow abundant graces on your elect: Look with favor, we entreat you, upon those who in these Lenten days are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant them the help of your protection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Ezekiel 37:21–28

Psalm 85:1–7 / The Gospel: John 11:45–53

John's Gospel (11:45-53) today tells us that Caiaphas, a high priest, "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."

Had the gospel informed us only that Jesus was going to gather all the dispersed children of God into one nation, that alone would have been very comforting, and we all like to be comforted. However, the last sentence tells us they planned from then on to put Jesus to death. This reminds us of the high price that Jesus pays for the dream of a unified faith community. Flannery O'Connor wrote in one of her letters that "holiness costs." Jesus is about to pay the highest price possible—the sacrifice of his earthly life—so that the faith community might have the hope of resurrection and salvation. The small sacrifices and duties of Lent in themselves mean little if we do not see them as reflective of the costs we must pay in our own quests for holiness. These costs may be on a small scale—instead of so many desserts for myself, I shall buy staples for the food pantry throughout the year—or larger. By "larger," I mean the costs of advocating for a just economic system, guaranteeing equal high-quality schools for all children and college-desiring adults, insuring everyone in our orbit and beyond enjoys the rights and good things we have ourselves. How might we pay these costs and do so joyfully?

Thomas Dukes

April 14, 2019 ~ Palm Sunday

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Philippians 2:5-11

Psalm 31:9-16 / The Gospel: Luke 22:14-23:56 or Luke 23:1-49



Titch Foster

April 15, 2019 ~ Monday in Holy Week

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 42:1-9; Hebrews 9:11-15
Psalm 36:5-11 / The Gospel: John 12:1-11

Once again, Martha is busy serving food to their guests while Mary sits at the feet of Jesus. “My extravagant sister,” I imagine Martha saying to herself. “I told her she shouldn’t spend all her money on that nard!” But then comes Jesus’ rebuke to Judas (and perhaps, Martha), “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.”

In the poem, “God’s Grandeur,” Gerard Manley Hopkins writes, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil; it gathers to a greatness like the ooze of oil crushed.” I love that image. Our God is an extravagant God. There are gorgeous sunsets, the sweetness of ripe fruit, and the fragrance of spring flowers. “How priceless is your love, O God,” says the psalmist. “They feast upon the abundance of your house; you give them drink from the river of your delights.”

Is all of this grandeur, all of this extravagance, necessary? After all, the poor are with us always; the captives and the oppressed await justice. I don’t think Jesus was being dismissive of the poor when he rebuked Judas. And I don’t think Mary was being foolish for spending so much on a “costly perfume.” I actually think there is plenty to go around! Plenty of love, plenty of beauty, plenty of justice. God has set an example for us to follow. Be unrestrained in your love for one another, recognise and share the extraordinary beauty around you, fight for the justice that God wishes for us all. It is there for the taking, and for the giving. It is there because God is ready to give some of that forgiveness to each of us.

Pam Zuhl

April 16, 2019 ~ Tuesday in Holy Week

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 49:1-7

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Psalm 71:1-14 / The Gospel: John 12:20-36

The Gospel of John reveals Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man. This Gospel begins with the assertion that Christ is one with God and has been for all of eternity (Jn. 1:1), and it reveals Christ as the incarnate Son (Jn. 1:14). Jesus proclaims that he and the Father are one (Jn. 10:30), and he refers to himself as “I am” (Jn. 8:58). And the Gospel writer concludes by telling us he has written his book so that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (Jn. 20:31).

But in today’s reading, it is Jesus the Son of Man who makes the decision to fulfill the purpose of his Incarnation, to die and to be raised to eternal life. It is through that decision that the world is judged, and the ruler of that world is driven out. It is through that decision that God the Father is glorified. It is through that decision that the Son of Man will draw all people to himself. And in fulfillment of scripture (Dan. 7:13-14), the Son of Man will be given “everlasting dominion” and a “kingship that [will] never be destroyed.”

Len Harrison

April 17, 2019 ~ Wednesday in Holy Week

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Hebrews 12:1-3

Psalm 70 / The Gospel: John 13:21-32

“When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once'.”

When I think of Jesus’s glorification, I visualize a spotlight illuminating him! Like the lead actor on the stage in a dramatic play. The lights and attention are focused on him. The main character’s words, actions and story are the most important, just like Jesus’s words and actions during Holy Week. The spotlight highlights the actor’s story and brings the audience’s attention to his drama and the climax. For Jesus, the action has been building throughout this week. The spotlight will soon be entirely on him. Judas goes out into the night. Jesus’s identity will be fully revealed. He will be illuminated through his words, actions and resurrection. God will be revealed in him.



Fern Daly MacMillan

April 18, 2019 ~ Maundy Thursday

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Psalms 116:1, 10-17 / The Gospel: John 13:1-17, 31b-35



Maria Metoki

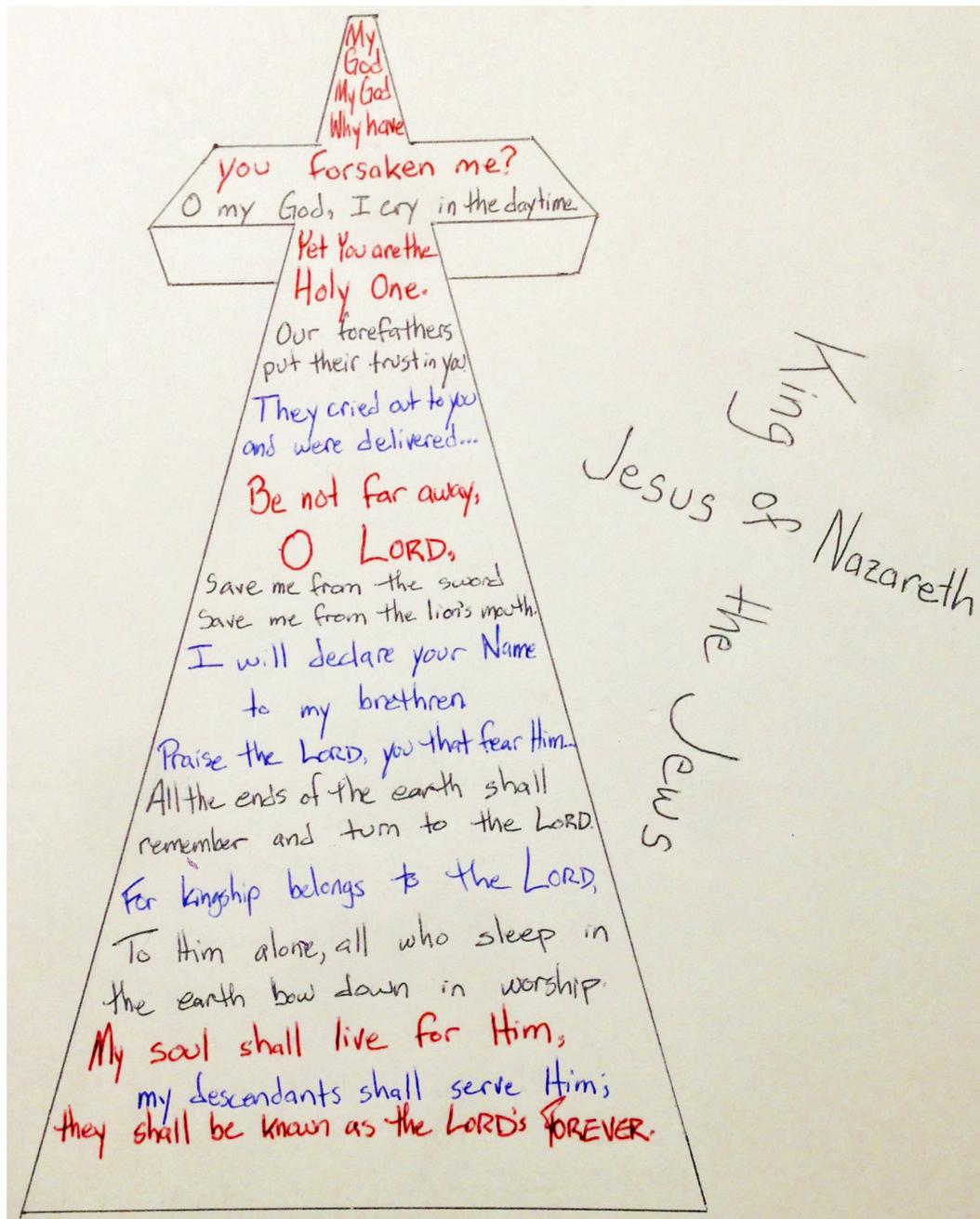
April 19, 2019 ~ Good Friday

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Psalm 22 / The Gospel: John 19:17-30



**Marcie
Harvey**

April 20, 2019 ~ Holy Saturday

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; 1 Peter 4:1-8
Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16 / The Gospel: Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42



My watercolor of Christ's burial place is based on a photograph of a traditional Jewish tomb. It would have been dug out of rock or built with stones; its entrance would have been sealed with a large round stone. That stone would not have been spherical. It was shaped like a millstone—flat, round, and about six inches thick, like stones used for grinding grain. Learning this helped me envision the stories of Joseph of Arimathea placing Jesus' body in the tomb and rolling the stone to cover the entrance. It also helped with the Easter stories of the empty tomb with the stone rolled away. The painting shows the stone partly covering the tomb behind it.

Carol Donley

April 21, 2019 ~ Easter Sunday

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Romans 6:3-11

Psalm 114 / The Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10



Ella Harvey

*Create in me a new heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Give me the joy of your saving help again
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.”*



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