

Saint Peter's Episcopal Church, Lewes

Reflections on Lent

2018



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Ash Wednesday – February 14 (Matthew 6:1-6,16-21)

The Rev. Larry Hofer

Jesus said, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

God's Dirty Face Children. On Ash Wednesday, as part of the penitential rite, the priest will put ashes on our foreheads. The day gets its name from this simple act. It is the Church's way of helping us with a physical sign that tells us that we are sinners. We don't like to talk about sin and few of us would describe ourselves as a sinner if we were to introduce ourselves to a stranger.

When we lived in Chicago, I used to walk over to the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago to have lunch. Each weekday at about 11:30 a truck marked Hot Dogs and Polish Sausages would arrive. A line of patrons soon formed: faculty members, men in hard hats who were working on an addition to Billings Hospital at the University, the short man over there is a world famous physicist, the president of the University used to be in the line, and over there is a group of students.

I used to be in that line even though I knew the polish sausages, which most of us were there for, were terrible for one's health. There were laden with fat, spices - especially garlic - and meat. The product of a thousand years of polish culture was wrapped in a bun that was full of the sausage and onions, one bite was enough to clear the sinuses for days.

One day as I stood in line, I looked behind me and there was a fellow communicant, Dr. Charles Platz, a pathologist at Billings Hospital. I asked Charles what he was getting and he said "a polish sausage sandwich." I expressed my surprise and said "you have examined the catastrophic effects of the little bounders on the human body at first hand and you are going to have one. He said "Yes all that is true, but they are very good." And so Charles and I went on doing what we knew we should not do. As St. Paul said in the 7th chapter of his letter to the Romans, "That which I ought to do is the very thing I do not do and that which I should not do is he very thing I do." And there is the human dilemma.

St. Augustine described human nature as "curved in upon itself" or as we would say today we are narcissistic. We cannot set ourselves free from sin. Only God in Christ can do that. As St. Paul wrote, "Who can rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The ashes are signs that we are sinners, but most of all that we are forgiven. Let this be a joyful Lent filled with the assurance of God's forgiveness and love.

Prayer. 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.*



Thursday, February 15 (Luke 9:18–25)

www <http://www.sacredspace.ie/node/187221>

Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.” He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?”

This is a crucial moment in Jesus’ life. He asks the question which lies at the heart of Christian faith and theology: ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter becomes the spokesperson for this little contingent of believers. Only later will they grasp how the term Messiah is understood by Jesus. Suffering, rejection and death await him, but then glory.

Note that Jesus prays before important moments in his ministry, as when he chose his twelve apostles. Was he consoled by the fact that, unlike Herod, the disciples recognize that he is the Messiah? Perhaps he had been wondering if he had failed to make himself known for who he was. But what will the disciples now make of his Passion?

In my prayer, I imagine Jesus asking me, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ What do I say? Do I believe that this mysterious Messiah of God will be with me even if, like him, I have to suffer greatly, and that in his own good time he will raise me up?

Prayer. Lord, to follow you I too must embark on a personal discovery of who you are. Give me the grace to walk this faith-journey. May I not keep you at arm’s length by putting a protective shield around myself, but help me rather to daily embrace you on the path of discipleship, with its pains and joys. *Amen.*



Friday, February 16 (Matthew 9:10–17)

Alan Speaker, Jr.

As Jesus sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

This record begins with Jesus asking Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him. If you read Mark 2:15 and Luke 5:29 you get more information that can help you understand.

Jesus is invited over to break bread and in the other accounts it says Matthew gave Jesus a feast and invited more than a few friends and family and coworkers to meet and hear Jesus teach. Of course that upset some religious leaders who questioned Jesus' disciples not Him directly, why He ate with tax collectors and publicans which would be public workers. Jesus heard them and said he came to save sinners not the righteous (or self-righteous). Then they asked why their followers and John the Baptists followers fasted but Jesus's did not fast. He explained that fasting was for the time of waiting but while He was here His disciples could ask Him anything and listen to Him directly. He was teaching those who would hear that there would come a time and now is where fasting would again be used to subjugate the physical world so that we could hear the spiritual. Reference Saul in Acts 9:9 and Peter in Acts 10:9-10.

Prayer. Father, thank you for all that your word shares about your Son, Jesus Christ and thank you for sending us holy spirit so that we can continue to walk and talk with you all the days of our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Saturday, February 17 (Luke 5:27–32)

The Rev. E. Perren Hayes

After healing the paralyzed man, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up, left everything, and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

These three days after Ash Wednesday prepare us for the rigors of Lent. Ash Wednesday, using burned palms from last Palm Sunday, reminds us who and what we are. Each one of us is made using “dust/dirt/ashes,” the fundamental thing from which everything is made. We are, in fact, exactly the same substance as every other part of God’s creation. The Hebrew word translated “dust” is the substance from which every single bit of creation is created. Everything that exists is – really – this “dust.” We must never forget that.

Just before today’s reading, Luke tells two healings: a sick man and even a man-who-cannot-make-any-movement-at-all. Luke is showing who will benefit from the Good News that Jesus brings to all humanity. These two are recipients of the actions from the Good News.

But Jesus cannot do it alone. So he goes to Levi. A tax collector! Jesus calls him: “Follow me!” And Levi “got up, left everything, and followed him.” And then Levi throws a big party, and invites all his friends! What is this? What has happened? Why Levi? Well, when you look at the Greek word, you find that the word translated as “got up” is, in fact, exactly the same word used to describe the resurrection of Jesus! (anastas) Levi didn’t just get up. He hears Jesus speak. He understands the Good News. And his entire life changed! Levi, the tax collector, was (what we call) a people person. He had to get along well with most people. Now he was prepared to talk to people about the Good News that had “resurrected” him into a new life. So he threw a party! He invited all his friends!

Community leaders, including church people, were horrified! Just look at Levi’s friends! But Jesus said that he didn’t come to “care for healthy people; ... he came to bring sinners to repentance.” The Greek word translated sinners (hamartoloi) is better translated team sportsman. People who work together in a disciplined pattern in order to bring Justice, Freedom, Equality, and Kindness to all people. Most English translations call this repentance. But the Greek word is “metanoia!” This word means “new birth! People – all people – need a new way of living. Jesus is announcing the Good News, that he (Jesus) is giving everyone (who hears/wants it) this new life. All the world – the dust/ashes/dirt – is offered the living life of Jesus – into which their own life is reborn . New Birth is a far better word to translate the Greek word “metanoia” than the usual “repentance.”

And that is what the church is asking us to do in Lent: strengthen our participation in the New Life! Participate fully with the Pro-team; strengthen discipline; develop ourselves with others into a living pattern that will bring Justice, Freedom, Equality, and Kindness to anyone in need – wherever they may be, whatever their condition. Amen!



Monday, February 19 (Matthew 25:31–46)

Jim Prettyman

Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 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 who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Jesus was extremely consistent throughout his ministry in telling us what he expects of us. In Matthew and Mark, we are given the Great Commandments, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In Luke we are told “Do unto others as you would have them do to you”. These instructions are consistent with Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in which he states the eight blessings for those in need. We all remember these from the earliest days in Bible school.

In today’s passage, in the very last days of his ministry and facing imminent death, he carries forward these instructions to us and deeply personalizes them by saying, “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”. In this he incorporates our individual actions of kindness – or lack of actions of kindness into his very being. He takes our actions very personally.

I am sure sometimes in my life I have been a goat, and hopefully there are times when I have been a sheep. In the end I hope the sheep will have outnumbered the goats. In the mean time I try to follow Jesus’s very clear instructions the best I can, and I am constantly mindful of the theme of my beloved wife, Anne, whose many acts of kindness literally affected hundreds of people. Written into her soul was the thought that “Kindness Matters”. I believe it mattered to all whom she met and it mattered to Jesus. It certainly mattered to me.

Prayer. Assist each of us, O Lord, to follow the example of your son Jesus, by ever increasingly being mindful of the needs of others and, with the deepest respect, treat others in the ways Jesus instructed us throughout his ministry. Amen



Tuesday, February 20 (Matthew 6:7–15)

Mary Beth Palkon-Krytzer

Jesus said, “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. “Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

It is our custom. Have you ever noticed the small print next to "The Lord's Prayer" in our Sunday program? It reads, "it is our custom, those who wish, to hold hands during this prayer." Custom? Hmmm? The definition of a custom is; a traditional, and widely accepted way of behaving, or doing something specific. We, the community of St. Peter's at each service when the Lord's Prayer is said, reach out for each other's hand without hesitation.....***our custom.***

Why do you think, we do this act so naturally? Sometimes I am amazed at the strength of one's hands when we say this prayer. Have you ever noticed the little squeeze you may get when the AMEN is said? Or the smile that comes across one's face? Even how, a simple comma, can change the wording of the sentence...."for those who wish"? Could it be our belief, "....that when two or three are gathered in my name, I am there." Matthew 18:20?

Matthew 6:9 states, "this is how you should pray," and the prayer given to us is, **THE LORD'S PRAYER** ! A prayer we say, sing and recite without hesitation . A prayer we don't "babble as pagans". --Matthew 6:7

Jesus sure made it easy for us. Jesus gave us this powerful prayer..."your will be done."

I invite you to be more conscious of this **custom** we do at St. Peter's. Whether it be in the touch, or the squeeze of another person's hand, or the smile that sometimes erupts from one's face after we say this prayer...and remember,...."when two or three are gathered, I am there".....pretty powerful indeed! **AMEN!**

The Prayer. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Thought for the day: Lord, let me not take for granted "**our custom**" here at St. Peter's.



Wednesday, February 21 (Luke 11:29–32)

Iona Smith

When the crowds were increasing, Jesus began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!"

Where's Jonah? The essence of this reading is – I'm here. Jesus says, "I sent Jonah as a prophet to prepare my way. Now the Son of Man has arrived."

Since I just returned from Floral City, Florida, Jonah is like a large alligator sunning on the bank of the Withlacoochee River. When Jesus comes, the alligator hurriedly sprints into the water. Jonah is not needed and job done!

We should stand out as faithful Christians, honest and be believers. Listen for Him to speak to you. Be like Jonah, when he was told to go to Nineveh he did.

Prayer. Dear Jesus, let me be like you in my daily walk. Give me strength and courage to be like Jonah. Let me spread your word in places like Nineveh. In your precious name, Amen.



Thursday, February 22 (Matthew 7:7–12)

Alan Speaker, Jr.

Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”

God wants to bless you when you believe that God wants to give you good things and you ask him for guidance and help because you cannot do it on your own God hears you and honors your request God is a righteous God and because of what Jesus Christ accomplished you are now God's righteous child ask knock and believe to receive it is God's Will and joy to give to you.

Prayer. Heavenly father thank you for the good things that you give us when we ask you with our hearts open and thank you for the example of a loving father that you have given to us and thank you for the wisdom to treat others in the same way in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen



Friday, February 23 (Matthew 5:20–26)

Bob Wardwell

Jesus said, “I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

In today's reading, Jesus raises the bar on the commandments from condemning those who murder to similarly condemning those who engage in public, violent and abusive anger. I certainly get angry and I believe it's important to admit it and use it as a device for self-examination. But when that anger is released against others, publicly, abusively, in the form verbal violence It damages those against whom it is directed, it damages those by-standers who witness it, and it damages the person themselves. It destroys the community that God intends for us all.

Jesus shouts out a warning about venting our anger on others: “For your own well-being and for the sake of all God's children, don't do it! Don't drink the poison of abusive anger!” We are condemning ourselves and undermining our community when we do this. Jesus tells us to first seek reconciliation with those in our human family we have harmed, then you come home to God.

We need only look at the news each day to see God's commandment being ignored by leaders, commentators, and each other. Abusive anger is brewing itself into a toxic stew that we are invited to drink. We can choose to drink it and share it with others or to obey God's commandment to seek reconciliation.

Prayer. God, we pray this day that you will give us the self-awareness to identify the anger in our hearts and the wisdom to use it to promote understanding rather than lashing out at our fellow human beings on this island earth. May you give us the courage to be those who stand for reconciliation with our human family rather than reflexively participating in the violence of toxic anger and abusive words and actions.



Saturday, February 24 (John 15:1,6-16) www.today.reframemedia.com/devotionals

Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name."

If you want to make your life count, Jesus wisely explains how. He says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

The challenge is to be devoted to living in and for Jesus, in a way like a branch is attached to a vine and depends on it for life. This takes our whole heart.

How can we accomplish this? Only by the power of Christ himself. He makes that clear when he says, "Apart from me you can do nothing" in the way of bearing fruit. And he adds, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

In the verses of our Scripture today, the words "fruit" or "fruitful" occur seven times. God's primary concern is not our comfort or happiness, but that we bear fruit. We need to let the gardener prune the self-centeredness and selfishness out of our lives so that we can truly remain in Jesus and bear fruit for his kingdom—"fruit that will last." Then others will enjoy God's goodness and be drawn to him also.

Christ is our lifeline, and he calls us to abide in him. Rather than living our own way, we grow to live his way, and he supplies all we need in order to do that. It's the only way to truly live—forever.

Prayer. Lord, you have called us to live in and for you. Fill us with your life, that we may bear fruit and share your goodness. Amen.

Monday, February 26 (Luke 6:27–38)

Stroud Hellebusch

Jesus said, “I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

This section of Luke’s Gospel is just chocked hard lessons. To be a good Christian; let an attacker continue to attack you; give the thief more than he stole; love, bless and pray for those who hate, curse and mistreat you. You aren’t good or special because you love and do good to those who love and do good towards you.

A glimmer of hope appears in the 3-part quid pro quo don’t judge, don’t condemn, forgive and you will be judged not, nor condemned, and forgiven. Simple; I will be off the hook if I do these things. But it isn’t quid pro quo, for the next verse discusses the “measure”. Therefore, if I forgive, in order that I be forgiven where is my measure? What credit can I take?

Ultimately the “good news’ is in the verse 35 and 36 which describes God as “kind to the ungrateful and wicked” and as “merciful.”

The abundant life that Christ promises does not come from following the Pharisees and being sure we have followed all the rules (theirs or the new ones listed in the New Testament) the abundant life comes from knowing that we are God’s children and his mercy is upon us even though we cannot earn it.

Prayer. Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace; where there is hatred let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. --St. Francis of Assisi



Tuesday, February 27 (Matthew 23:1–12)

PG Somerset

Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

“Do as I say and not as I do”. Isn’t that the mantra of so many of us. It is what adults teach children, what bankers teach investors, and let us not even discuss celebrities and politicians. We light up when we hear things like this; after all, hypocrisy is the root of all the evils of our time, right? And then he goes on to say that if one calls someone father or teacher that they are no better. If you are like me, this might have you saying ‘aw nuts...’ because you’ve sprung the Jesus trap in this passage. But that is the point. Jesus knows that like his followers, we are not perfect. The point isn’t perfection but as John Wesley said, “*the progress towards perfection.*” We will never be perfect nor will we always ‘progress’ towards it. What we are asked is to know and forgive our own imperfections. Jesus does not call us broken nor blame us for our failings. He sees us as we are and asks us to do the same. It seems to me that when we see these imperfections in others and their struggle to overcome them, Jesus is asking us to love them as sisters and brothers in Christ.

Prayer. We know that we will never be perfect but we strive to be like you. Watch and guide us on our paths and help us to be better each day. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



Wednesday, February 28 (Matthew 20:17–28)

www.davidlose.net

While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.” Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” He said to them, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Although Matthew obviously didn’t have the term available to him, today we might call the mother of James and John a “helicopter parent.” Bringing her sons to Jesus, she kneels in a posture of deference and worship to beg a favor – namely, that her sons would occupy positions of honor and power in Jesus’ kingdom. He, in turn, asks them whether they are ready to drink the cup that Jesus will drink; that is, suffer his fate. This is first time the scene just prior to this one comes into play, as “the cup” Jesus references is clearly his impending death in Jerusalem. But as clear as that reference may be to us, James and John clearly do not get it, answering immediately that they are ready, if not even eager, to share Jesus’ fate. Jesus then affirms that they will indeed sacrifice their lives for the gospel – something that Matthew’s community likely already knows – but that granting the honor the mother of James and John requests is the privilege only of the Father.

When the rest of the disciples hear what Mrs. Zebedee requested, they are, quite frankly, rather ticked off. They feel like James and John are cutting the line, trying to insinuate themselves into Jesus' good graces ahead of them. And whatever we may think about the initial request or the disciples' reaction, it's clear that Jesus thinks something is awry. Indeed, Jesus concludes that they – all of them – misunderstand what true greatness looks like. Which is the second time that Jesus' prediction comes into play. Because Jesus not only talks about a different understanding of greatness that is rooted in service, but he has just spelled out his own profound commitment to servant leadership, even to the point of sacrificing his life.

Jesus' teaching and example, of course, wasn't contrary only to Gentile practice, but also to our own. We also tend to think about greatness in the world's terms of accomplishment, wealth, and power. But Jesus invites us to imagine greatness along the relational lines of the kingdom of God Jesus proclaims. In this kingdom, we are invited to discover our true humanity and the meaning of our lives in and through the good we do and receive from those around us.

This initially often sounds rather odd, even foreign, to us, until you think about it for just a moment. If you were to call to mind, for instance, your three favorite memories of those times when you felt most alive, most content and joyful, and most in touch with your own sense of your true self – that is, if you recall memories of when you felt *great* – I'm guessing they were not solely, or even primarily, memories of when you received some honor or exercised great power, but rather were connected to your relationships with others: wonderful meals, important conversations, moments of tender care and shared service, and more.

Which is finally what the kingdom of God is all about. It's not some *other* kingdom God establishes, but rather the original, authentic kingdom for which God prepared us before the beginning of time, that realm in which we are valued and honored as the children of God and freed to treat others the same.

Prayer. *Dear God, draw us into your kingdom – even here, even now in our everyday relationships – that we might find our meaning, purpose, and greatness in and through our connection to you and those around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



Thursday, March 1 (Luke 16:19–31)

The Rev. Canon Mark Harris

Jesus said, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house-- for I have five brothers-- that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

“If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” Well there you are. The resurrection is not the “proof” of anything. It does not convince, it does not push us to be better persons, it does not keep us from going to hell. The resurrection is a source of amazement and delight, of awe and even of terror. But it does not convince.

That seems to be what Jesus says about resurrection, about raising Lazarus his friend, and even about Lazarus in the story being able to reach us from beyond death.

Resurrection is a wonder, an awe, an amazement, delight and terror because it is evidence that the power of death is not final. The dominion of death is not complete. It means that counter to the forces of entropy, disintegration, corruption and our own deaths, there is the promise of new creation, new life in God.

But belief in the resurrection or listening to someone who rose from the dead does not lead to repentance. It is the Law and the Prophets that convince us of the need to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Jesus points to the Law and the Prophets and repentance based on those. His resurrection points forward to an abundance in life that death cannot conquer. In the resurrection we have the sign that our repentance is preparation for participation in a new creation – one signaled by Baptism. The Law, the Prophets and Baptism... the recipe for fullness of life where death has no power, and life is abundant.

Prayer. Lead us, dear Lord Jesus, to do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with God, and so prepared, open our hearts to know the abundance of blessing that comes from living fully in the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Friday, March 2 (Matthew 21:33–43)

www.sacredheartmessenger.com

Jesus said, "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

A common image for Jesus is the garden or the vineyard, with comments on wasteland and fruitful land. In this story he looks at stones and points out that a rejected stone, if looked at again, could become the cornerstone of a building. He is referring to prophets who were rejected, and to himself. He would be through his weakness and death, the essential stone of the new temple, the energy through death of the new community.

We live in a throwaway culture. Much of what could be used again is dumped to destroy the earth and the sea. We waste a lot of the daily bread of the people. Jesus asks us always to look again, to see the value of what we may throw aside, especially in our treatment of each other.

Everyone has a value in the eyes of God. Pope Francis noted: ‘When adolescents feel unloved, they may turn to violence, hatred or delinquent behavior. There is no such thing as bad children or evil adolescents, he said, but there are unhappy people.’ (June 2107). He is asserting that with love and a community of acceptance, everyone has a place and has something to offer, like every stone is valuable to a new building, especially some we may first throw away.

Prayer. I thank you, Lord, for the wonder of my being. Amen.



Saturday, March 3 (Luke 15:11–32)

Alan Speaker, Jr.

Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

The parable of the prodigal son or the forgiving father. Some of the remarkable things that stand out to me in these verses are in verse 12 after the younger son asked for his portion it says his father divided unto them his living. Both sons received on that day and verse 17 it says he came to himself we need to do that with God just turn to him the son rehearsed his speech all the way home but in verse 20 it says when he was yet a great way off the father saw him and ran to him. That is our loving God people. Jesus Christ came for the acknowledged sinner not the person who thinks he can do it on his own but God loves all of us even when we act like the Elder Son. God loves us. Aare we loving like that?

Prayer. Heavenly father thank you for the tremendous example of a loving father that you have given us in this parable also thank you that we can turn to you always for guidance and for love and for protection and that we never get too proud to turn to you and accept your love for us and I thank you that we can learn to love each other the way you love us and the name of your son Jesus Christ, Amen.

Monday, March 5 (Luke 4:23–30)

PG Somerset

In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Jesus has just told his hometown crowd that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him when today's reading picks up. They love his celebrity until he starts insulting them, at which point they want to throw him off a cliff. Too often we look at this part of Luke's Gospel as an example of speaking truth to power and the troubles of fame in one's own hometown. But Luke has more going on under the surface. Jesus tells the crowd that scripture is fulfilled by their listening. The periscope is full of verbs, of actions like speaking, listening, quoting, shutting, driving, and throwing. The scripture is proclaimed, the Spirit is invoked and things happen.

Prayer. Lord, we don't always hear what you are saying. We try to listen but our minds and hearts are closed. Send us your Spirit and make us open to you. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Tuesday, March 6 (Matthew 18:21–35)

Bob Howard

Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Judgement, Responsibility, Love, Forgiveness Grace. This is one of those biblical passages, the literal reading of which, I find difficult and that I believe my Anglican friends find supportive of their concept of a judgmental God. So how do I reconcile this passage with my concept of a loving and forgiving God and the concept of Grace?

I have had the good fortune in my experience in government service to be a small cog in the large wheels of two significant and very successful programs. One was managed by a philosophy that men are best motivated by fear of reprisal for poor performance and the other was managed by a philosophy that people are more effectively motivated by the satisfaction of success and the satisfaction of a job well done. Both programs achieved their goals but I can assure you that from my perspective it was much more pleasant working in the program that did not rely on fear as a motivator but rather the desire to excel.

How does this relate to today's Gospel reading? The issue with the slave and his master is that the slave did not love his neighbor as himself. The loving but judgmental master punished him severely when he demonstrated this fact. The message to us is that if we do not likewise love our neighbors, we will be punished by God. An alternative message is that if we do not love our neighbors we will suffer because we distance ourselves from a relationship with God. In this case, the punishment is self-inflicted and the behavior and remedies are all of our own choosing, somewhat akin to being motivated by the desire to feel good about ourselves rather than the fear of being punished.

If we truly love God and our neighbors as ourselves, we will be fulfilled and have nothing to fear. We have the freedom to choose the path we take. Our ability to choose correctly, with God's help is a matter of grace.

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



Wednesday, March 7 (Matthew 5:17–19)

Chris Miller-Marcin

Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Fulfilling the Law. The fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament is part of the Sermon on the Mount. This is one of the most debated verses in the Gospel. 5:17 begins a new section where Jesus discusses the Law and the Prophets.

You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt becomes tasteless, how is it going to become salty again? You are the light of the world! What Jesus is talking about here is about community, the church is not individuals. The way we organize our common life; together as a people matters, because we are the salt and light reaching out into the community and the world. It is limitless.

Salt flavors food, it's not the main taste; it brings out other flavors that are already exist. The church can bring out the flavors in our community/world. Salt is a preservative it keeps things from rotting. It doesn't take much, a tiny bit flavors the whole thing.

If the flavor is bland, bitter or sour (in the church), salt can help. If there are darkness, is cold, people afraid; light can help.

Light is an evocative image, as well. Try sitting in total darkness with only a candle lit, after your eyes adjust. You will be amazed how much light one candle gives off. Again it is a very small thing, but it holds a lot of power. Scripture talks of spiritual darkness. But light is this rich image of what the church can be.

Jesus is using images of salt and light in order to stimulate our imagination in response to the deficiency of church community and the world.

Jesus whole conflict with the Pharisees seems to have been about what it means to keep the law. The law was is important. The Pharisees had developed a highly complex oral tradition. And this teaching would be passed down to generation to generation. And it was about keeping the law perfectly. The problem with their oral tradition, their way of keeping Torah, was that it counted too many people out, especially the poor. So, instead of helping people to observe the law, their tradition prevented people from observing the law. So Jesus begins to teach his followers that the law was never meant to be a way to placate God...but to get God to love and forgive them. God's love is always free. The law was meant to form their character. "You will be blessed to be a blessing." Jesus is not careless about the requirements of the law, he wants us to be attentive to the law. The sermon then concludes with sharp warnings to pay attention to what Jesus is saying!

Prayer. Gracious and loving God, we cannot face the challenges of life alone, nor can we grow without you. Grant us your grace and love to be able to get over or passed all the bumps in the road of life and to treasure everything that you have given us and all things yet to come. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Thursday, March 8 (Luke 11:14–23)

Joyce Gleason

Jesus was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven. But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? —for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."

In this portion of the journey of Jesus, we learn of Jesus driving out a demon that had rendered a man mute. All were amazed when the man spoke. What is interesting is, that there was no doubt that Jesus had done it but there was a question by some as to how he had done it. Some people thought that Jesus was controlled by Satan (Beelzabub) and given the power to perform the miracle. Christ's enemies hated his powerful works of mercy. Others asked for more miracles or a sign from Heaven. Jesus challenged the people asking why Satan would make the man mute and then restore his speech. Why would he stand against himself if he wants to survive? A divided kingdom does not stand. The lines are being drawn and positions about Jesus are hardening.

He goes on to say that if he drives out the demons by the finger of God, what does that say about who he is? He is the one sent from God. He has the power over Satan. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Jesus is telling them that they must make a choice.

Prayer. Heavenly Father, We know that Satan is always hard at work in this world, trying to place doubt in you and draw us closer to him. Keep us always steadfast in the path to you. Let us gather around the cross of Christ, the conqueror of Satan, to hear your word and eat at your table so that when the day comes, we may gather with all of the saints in heaven. Hear us O Lord. Amen



Friday, March 9 (Mark 12:28–34)

www.onlineministries.creighton.edu

One of the scribes came near and heard Jesus and the Saducees disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

As I read these passages, I could really identify with the scribe in today’s Gospel. With all the different and challenging teachings Jesus provides, the scribe wants to simplify things and discover the main guideline from which he should base his life. In a way, he is saying, “Jesus, I know all your teachings are important. But to which one should I most fully give my attention?” The scribe’s question relates quite well to our own experiences. We often want to identify the main idea of a message given to us, whether it is in a college lecture or a presentation at work. We strive to discover the ideas that should not be missed or forgotten, and the scribe’s question applies this same process to our faith lives.

Instead of just saying all of his commandments are equally important, Jesus answers the scribe by first emphasizing that God is God alone and without equal. Therefore, we should love and serve God with all of our being. Jesus shows that we are called to direct our whole lives to God, which includes our actions and choices. As a result, we should view the rest of Jesus’ teachings as helping us to love and come closer to God. Jesus then points out that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are called to show God’s unceasing love for all people, which enables us to more fully see God’s presence in the world.

While it may seem these commandments are too basic or simple, think about the numerous times where we have found it difficult to follow these teachings. So many things in our lives try to pull our focus away from serving God and others: greed, wealth, pride, grades, and even fear. We must continually remind ourselves of the importance of these commandments, and I think this Lenten season has the ability to bring our minds back to God. Through our Lenten fasts, we are able to tell God, “I may have earthly desires, God, but nothing comes even close to my desire to love and serve you.” Therefore, when we struggle with keeping our Lenten promises, let us look to today’s Gospel and remember we are showing God that he comes first in our lives.

Prayer. Gracious God, help me to forever keep you first in my life. In Jesus’ name we pray.

Saturday, March 10 (Luke 18:9–14)

Hanna Hannon

Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

The Pharisee is very happy with his own image. Very hard to change when you are pleased as punch with yourself. Plus it hurts to change. Like being at the wedding banquet and the host saying, "Friend, go down lower."

Somehow, the tax collector has looked into himself, sees his limits and failings, the universal condition. But he's still in church, still praying, still loving God.

We all agree with Socrates, "Know thyself." It's just hard to recognize, let alone let go of, our cherished illusions. Thomas Merton says, at times of the worst adversity, when our hearts have turned to stone, we are never closer to God. I suspect deep joy works too. Let us take any opportunity to become who God made us to be.

Prayer. Father, bless us in all our brokenness and give us honest hearts. Amen.



Monday, March 12 (John 4:43–54)

Teri Munz

When the two days were over, Jesus went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival. Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Your Son Will Live. Christ here gives us an example, of his power, that he not only could heal, but could heal with so much ease, without the trouble of a visit. After a brief conversation with Jesus, the nobleman believed the word of Christ: He believed, and started on his way.

Though Christ did not go with the man, he was satisfied with the method Christ took. Jesus said, your son lives and the man believed him; not only believed the omniscience (insight) of Christ, that he knew the child had recovered, but the omnipotence (supremacy) of Christ, that the cure was effected by his word.

The father came to realize not of what Jesus could do, but of who he was, that he had authority over all illness, that he was not limited by distance or time, that he had power in areas beyond the knowledge and reach of men. When the man understood that, he believed along with his whole household. This marks a trust that God was at work and would work out this matter in ways that he could not anticipate. This royal official saw something more than a miracle-worker.

*If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you. --Psalm 139 (NRSV)*

Prayer. Heavenly Father, how grateful we are for this account. How it speaks to us today. Grant with the help of the Holy Spirit that we may review with renewed encouragement, renew trust, that you know what you are doing in our lives and are strengthening our faith in the process. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.



Tuesday, March 13 (John 5:1–18)

PG Somerset

There was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, "It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take it up and walk'?" Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you have been made well! Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

A few years ago rabbis in New York discussed if turning on a hotplate constituted work. The problem had been that the faithful were turning on hotplates on Friday and turning them off on Sunday. This overheated the plates and was causing fires. To people outside the community this may sound odd, or silly, or pedantic. Much of our mirror-opposite culture—where everything is 24-hour access—comes from this passage and others like it. Since Jesus worked on the Sabbath therefore so can we. Here in southern Delaware everywhere I go I see people working day and night, even the retirees. What if Jesus came here today? Would he say to you 'pick up your mat', or would he say 'shut down your laptop and be at peace'?

We scoff at those in power in this passage, and like Jesus, we appeal for the obvious humanity. Do we do the same when we go out to dinner on a Sunday, or grocery shop in the early morning? Do we appeal to the humanity of the situation when we are the ones in power? Maybe this Lent you could try not spending money at times that undermine decent labor hours. Try being the one who says 'be well in the Lord'.

Prayer. Dear Lord, help us to pick up our mat and find ways to be more like you. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Wednesday – March 14 (John 5:19–29)

livingspace.sacredspace.ie/l1044g/

Jesus said to the Jews, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life. “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

Today’s Gospel follows immediately on yesterday’s story of the healing of the crippled man by the pool. That passage had ended with the words: “The Jews began to persecute Jesus because he did this [i.e. the healing] on a sabbath.” We might point out, as with some other sabbath healings, that there was absolutely no urgency to do the healing on a sabbath for someone who had waited 38 years. It is just another indication of the divine authority with which Jesus works. So Jesus’ reply is direct and unapologetic: “My Father is at work until now, so I am at work.” Because Genesis speaks of God resting on the seventh day (the origin of the Jewish sabbath), it was disputed whether God was in any way active on the sabbath. Some believed that the creating and conserving work of his creation went on and others that he continued to pass judgement on that day. In any case, Jesus is claiming here the same authority to work on the sabbath as his Father and has the same powers over life and death.

The Jewish leaders are enraged that Jesus speaks of God as his own Father. They want to kill him. They understand by his words that Jesus is making himself God’s equal. Jesus, far from denying the accusation, only confirms it.

“A son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will also do.” This saying is taken from the model of an apprentice in a trade. The apprentice son does exactly what his father does. Jesus’ relation to his Father is similar. “For the Father loves his Son and shows him everything that he himself does, so that you may be amazed.” And “just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes” – and whenever he wishes. And such giving of life is something that belongs only to God. As does the right to judge, which Jesus says has been delegated to him. Jesus is the perfect mirror of the Father. The Father is acting in him and through him. He is the Word of God – God speaks and acts directly through him. God’s Word is a creative Word. Jesus, like the Father, is life-giving, a source of life.

The right to judge has been delegated by the Father to the Son. And to refuse to honor the Son is to refuse the same honor to the Father. In everything Jesus acts only according to the will of his Father and does what his Father wants. Jesus, then, is the Way, the Way through whom we go to God. For us, there is no other Way. He is God’s Word to us and for us.

Prayer. Dear Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life. Help me to keep your commandments and follow you every day of my life. Amen.



Thursday, March 15 (John 5:30–47)

Tracy Mulveny

Jesus said, “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me. “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John’s. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

Imagine Jesus having been introduced by John, speaking to a crowd gathered to learn more about him. To paraphrase John’s reporting of this event, this might be what Jesus said to that crowd: “I hear you and my opinion of you is accurate because I am following the will of God (who sent me). I am not speaking for myself alone.

John has spoken in my favor and his testimony is true. You were willing to rejoice in his message that the Messiah is among you. By my actions, which my Father has allowed me to perform, you should be able to see that I was sent by God. Still you do not believe the word of God because you do not believe in me as the Son of God. I have come in my Father’s name and yet you look for salvation from those you know. You have said you believe in the word of Moses, and yet he told you about me, and still you doubt the salvation that I am offering you.”

Prayer. Heavenly Father, open my ears to hear and my eyes to see your presence in my life and guide me as I try to follow your will, in the sure hope of eternal life with you in your heavenly kingdom. Amen



Friday, March 16 (John 7:1–2,10,25–30)

www.ivingspace.sacredspace.ie/l1046g/

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.” Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.

Jesus did not want to go to Judea and the vicinity of Jerusalem because there were people there who wanted to kill him. Jesus does not expose himself unnecessarily to danger. He knows that a time is coming when the final conflict will be inevitable but that time is not yet. It is the time of the Feast of Tabernacles and (this is not contained in today’s reading) his family are urging him to go up to Jerusalem for the feast and show himself to the world. He tells them the time is not ripe for him to do this but later on, after his family have left for the city, he goes privately and

unknown to others. However, in Jerusalem, Jesus goes to the Temple area and begins to teach openly to the amazement of his listeners: “How does he know scripture without having studied?”

Jesus is a source of some confusion in the minds of many people. On the one hand, the people are aware that Jesus has become a target of their religious leaders and yet he goes about openly and speaking freely and without fear. Jesus would not be Jesus if he were to keep his message to himself. The Word of God cannot remain silent. On the other hand they are also confused about the identity of Jesus. Is he allowed to speak freely because the leaders now believe he really is the Messiah-Christ? But everyone knows where Jesus comes from (Nazareth in Galilee). How, then, can he be the Messiah?

Jesus then tells them: “Yes, you know me and you know where I come from.” That is only partially true; rather, they think they know. “Yet I did not come on my own, but the One who sent me, whom you do not know, is true. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” And, if they do not know the Father, how can they know the Son? And vice versa. This only angers his listeners who know what he is implying but they cannot arrest him there and then because “his time had not yet come”. The time of his arrest will only be in accordance with God’s plan.

Prayer. Dear Jesus, as we prepare during this Lenten season for your death and resurrection, we pray that you will guide us and show us the way to be with you in eternity.



Saturday, March 17 (John 7:37–52)

www.gospelbaseddisciple.blogspot.com

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “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.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, “This is really the prophet.” Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But some asked, “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” So there was a division in the crowd because of him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why did you not arrest him?” The police answered, “Never has anyone spoken like this!” Then the Pharisees replied, “Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.” Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?” They replied, “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

“Why did you not arrest him?” – The leaders are at it again, and are afraid of Jesus and his prophetic message. The festival has ended and Jesus offers us an invitation again to believe in him and the message that he brings. He is the source of ‘living water’ – and offers the world a drink.

The Pharisees and scribes continue to question his authority and the source of Jesus’ message. They get tied up in the semantics of where he is from and whether he fits the prophecy that has been handed down from the patriarchs and prophets. It is interesting that they still haven’t done anything about Jesus who is obviously upsetting the apple cart.

Nicodemus, a friend and follower of Jesus, moves in and returns the challenge. He reminds the leaders that the law requires a hearing to determine if there is any guilt. (We should remember that what Jesus is doing is not illegal. It's upsetting the leadership, but it's not illegal) The leaders are quick to challenge and dismiss Nicodemus too, stating that he must be a supporter because he is from the same place.

It seems that these texts has a lot to do with location. Why is that where Jesus lives has so much bearing on who he is? It kind of reminds me of someone (possibly from a small town in the south) saying to someone else, "hey boy - where are you from?" -- followed by "you ain't from around here are you!" There are already folks that are outwardly calling him prophet and messiah and I think that the leaders are feeling more threatened than ever. I feel that this text has a call to us to believe. Not listen to the leaders who are condemning Jesus, but be willing to fully believe and then take a drink from the source of the living water, which is our salvation.

Prayer. Gracious God, we are so sad about how these people treated your Son. No one believed him. Help us to remain faithful to your laws and believe in you. We pray in your name. Amen.



Monday, March 19 (Luke 2:41-52)

PG Somerset

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

I have an 11-year-old boy, and to think about his missing for three days is terrifying. To then imagine him sitting in church saying "Duh, where did you think I'd be?" conjures a very different emotion. Joseph and Mary's response has certainly been edited because Luke simply says that Jesus was obedient afterward. He doesn't mention for how long Jesus was grounded. Is this why we don't hear from Jesus for years after this? Seriously, most of the youth at St. Peter's would feel comfortable letting themselves into the church. Isn't this for what we strive as a Christian community? Isn't that why we leave the doors open, so that Christ as a child can come and sit?

Prayer. Lord, always keep the doors open in our hearts and to see you more clearly. Amen.



Tuesday, March 20 (John 8:21–30)

John Mears

Jesus said to the Jews, “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.” Then the Jews said, “Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’?” He said to them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.” They said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Why do I speak to you at all? I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.” As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

In much the same way as you might catch just one scene of a movie that obviously is only part of something much larger happening, the verses of the eighth chapter of John’s gospel, beginning at verse 21 and ending at the 30th are like a clip taken from a film that, *if you know that film, could almost stand for the entire movie!* In the original Greek, verse 21 (transliterated) is ‘Again he said to them, “I am going and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin; where I am going you are not able to come.”’ Enigmatic if you are not aware that the “I” is, of course, Jesus; but who is the “them” he is speaking to? Most English translations put “the Jews” here, which not only helps to reinforce the accusation that the gospel of John is anti-semitic (which in my opinion it isn’t) but isn’t really helpful. We have been told Jesus is in the Temple, where only Jews are permitted, but more importantly John is a *gospel* – a proclamation of *the* good news. This good news is being proclaimed not merely to those people present but to the *cosmos*; not just their “world” but to our own and to every world – *cosmos*. The Greek word **κοσμος** meant (and means) much more than just “world” or even “universe” and it can be argued that using these words to translate it is misleading.

We are told (at least most of?) the people that were present didn’t “get it” so Jesus goes on to “explain” it to them (and to us?) that that he is from a different, higher **κοσμος** that they (and we?) can only reach if they (and we?) can have faith that he, Jesus, is **I AM! That Jesus and I AM are one and the same!** Some of those that heard Jesus say this then did have that faith. But some did not, because John’s gospel reports some of them said then “Who are you?” Duh! Sounding a bit exasperated Jesus replies “...why am I even speaking to you?” But this *is* Jesus after all, so he continues and spells it out for them (and for us?) but they still don’t “get it” so he continues (verse 28) “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that **I AM**, and I do nothing from myself; but just as the Father taught me, I speak these things. And (verse 29) the one who has sent me is with me; he did not leave me alone, because I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”

May we – may I – like those who, hearing these words being said, had faith and believed, also believe with that same faith. Amen.



Wednesday, March 21 (John 8:31–42)

www.epriest.com/reflections/view/696

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.” They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.” They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.”

Faith isn’t real until it touches our attitudes and, above all, our concrete choices. To “remain” in the word of Christ means to conform our lives with his life and his virtues, especially the virtue of charity, which is the very essence of Christian doctrine and morality. To “remain” in his word is, as some would say, “to walk the walk.” In another passage we are told that it is not those who say “Lord, Lord...” who will enter the Kingdom, but only those who actually do the Father’s will in their lives. Remaining in his word is the stuff of sanctity – it’s also the stuff of daily perseverance and of knowing how to get up, dust ourselves off, and begin again each time we falter or fall along the way. How well do I “remain” in Christ’s word? Could an impartial observer see from my attitudes and actions that I follow Christ?

Christ seems to imply that there are true and false disciples. There is only one way to tell the difference between the two: whether one actually embraces his word not only as an ideal, but also as a rule of life. Today a plethora of voices, even within the Christian community, would have us follow a purely “therapeutic” Christianity – a form of Christianity in which we can supposedly believe in Christ while adopting behaviors or attitudes which are totally opposed to his “way” of discipleship as taught authoritatively by the Church. The temptation to separate faith and practice is never far from us. How much have these false voices impacted my own understanding of what it means to follow Christ as a member of his body, the Church?

The freedom promised by Christ to those who remain in his word is much deeper than the freedom offered by the world. Christ’s freedom is not simply a political freedom. Neither is it the ability to choose whatever I want, when I want, and how I want. The freedom of Christ’s disciple is spiritual, moral, and interior; it is the freedom for which every person longs in the depths of his heart. And only Christ gives this kind of freedom.

Prayer. Thank you, Lord, for the freedom you have given me! With it I could seek happiness in broken vessels of clay, forgetting you, the fountain of living waters. You could have made me not free.... But thus you have created me, and I want to be free. I want to know how to be free. I want to demonstrate that I am free, with the most sovereign act of my freedom: Lord, since I am free, I give my freedom, my will, to you, so that your will may be done.



Thursday, March 22 (John 8:51–59)

Lorri Camilleri

Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’ though you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

In this Gospel by John, Jesus is being verbally attacked by the people in the temple. They do not accept what he is saying to them. It is in this passage that he uses the phrase, “I am” to show his claim to divinity but the crowd is angry and they did not believe him. They called him “demon-possessed” and “Samaritan” and accused him of a crime punishable by death, “blasphemy”. The crowd had stones and were going to stone him to death but Jesus knew it was not yet his time nor place die so he left the temple. Those in the temple did not know the Father as Jesus did and couldn’t comprehend what he was trying to say to them.

This story reminds me (in a strange way) of the words to one of my favorite hymns, *We Walk By Faith*. “*We walk by faith and not by sight, no gracious words we hear. Of him who spoke as none ere spoke, but we believe him near.*”

Our faith sustains us when things are not going in the right direction. We need to trust what Jesus tells us and believe in him. We may not understand at the time why things happen the way they do but need to trust and know that they are all part of the master plan that he has set forth for us.

Prayer. Dear Jesus, I try so hard to place my trust in you. Give me the strength to walk by faith and show me your way. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Friday, March 23 (John 10:31–42)

Alan Speaker, Jr.

The Jews took up stones again to stone Jesus. Jesus replied, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?” The Jews answered, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.” Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If those to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’—and the scripture cannot be annulled—can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, “John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.” And many believed in him there.

It is important in this record to read all of chapter 10 of the Gospel of John to get the background of the quotes of Jesus in verses 31 through 42. In chapter 10 of John Jesus gives a few examples of Jesus being the only mediator between God and man. The majority of those

who hurt him we're up and arms and ready to Stone him again not because he blaspheme like they accused but he stated that they cannot get close to God except through him. Jesus is reference goes back to the law where the leadership of the Jews under the law where Gods to Israel and God was God to the leadership for example Moses. After that Jesus vanished from their grasp. He then talked to cycles of John the Baptist who only started to believe Jesus when they recognize that Jesus was he that was prophesied by John the Baptist their leader. A valuable lesson that we should follow the leadership today who show us Jesus Christ.

Prayer. Heavenly father thank you for sending your son Jesus Christ to be the payment for our sins and to be our Shepherd and for his being the only door to you. Teach us to love you more and more every day in the name of our living Lord and Savior Jesus Christ amen.



Saturday, March 24 (John 11:45–53)

PG Somerset

Many of the Jews 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.

The term ‘signs’ in this passage has also been translated as miracles. The word means ‘especially ceremonially or supernaturally’, and because of this Caiaphas and the others seek to kill Jesus for the sake of Israel. This logic is something that still sounds familiar to us. Kill the messenger and the message dies. This was the fate of many messengers in Roman times. In those days the spoken word was understood to carry more power than the written word. Words can carry portent because they live in a way that written documents never can. We still see the *importance* of this in words like *porter*. A *porter* is a person who carries objects, cargoes for others, or is a person proclaiming information on behalf of someone of power. A *reporter* is therefore someone who retells information, truth, or portent. In this context is it surprising that reporters are loved and loathed in equal measure?

The Pharisees understood Jesus to be the message, the miracle, the sign. They could not understand that Jesus was both, the message and the messenger, the portent and the reporter. They could not know this because the Cross had not yet happened. As people say, ‘hind sight is 20/20 vision.’ In our lives today how do we know we are making the right decisions? We don’t, but we have faith thanks to the Cross that the Lord is leading us in the correct direction, and that the Lord can fix the mistakes we make. If you ever doubt this look at the work the Lord did with the Pharisees.

Prayer. Lord guide me through my days, and help those around me when I go astray. Amen.



Monday in Holy Week, March 26 (John 12:1-11)

The Rev. E. Perren Hayes

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Preparing for Passover, Jesus and his disciples arrive at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. They will have a happy and festive meal as they prepare for the great Passover celebration. Martha, as usual, does all the kitchen work, and serves the meal. Mary, on the other hand, prepares Jesus, not for the meal – instead, she prepares his living body for his coming death. She washes his feet; she dries them with her hair; she anoints them with a high quality perfume. They all know how the High Priest in his clerical assistants are planning to bring his preaching to an end. That life will be destroyed, and Jesus will be no more! Judas Iscariot, attempting to save money, raises the question of selling the perfume, and using the money to care for the poor. (The name "Iscariot" is unknown to modern scholars – it seems to have no translatable meaning:- but some editor – perhaps – accuses him of theft.)

Jesus speaks – sharply – to Judas. "Leave her alone! She knows what is about to happen!" The author of John's Gospel wants us to see that even though Jesus is in fact God, his human faith has to be tested ultimately! There are no "ifs, ands, or buts" about the Water (for washing-baptism), Light (for insight) and, Life, the Good News of the Gospel.

Water is always available. Endurance will test faith. But true Faith is trustworthy beyond human capacity. Life is the nature of God. And as such – just as is indicated in Genesis 2:4-5 -- life is part of natural creation. Its character may change, but it can never vanish! And so Jesus too must show that all reality belongs to God, and reality can never be destroyed. Jesus dies to show that this is true; he knows that he will be raised from the dead. And he knows that this will show that faith in the great Creator God cannot be destroyed. It can only be illuminated and illustrated. **BY RESURRECTION. (NEW BIRTH – FAITH)**

The world is filled with many people; all people have some sort of faith; and that faith will support them – according to its strength – through most of the difficult issues of common, united, life. The poor are always there. It takes work – difficult work – to see the faith, the trust, that indeed God's creation continues to exist – and nothing can destroy it.

The poor, whom we always have with us, perceive this. Their difficult lives are filled with faith and trust. Weak though some of them may seem, nevertheless, they shall always continue. That's why they respond to the preaching of Jesus – because they "feel in their hearts" the power of the truth of the Good News that Jesus and his apostles bring to the world. Even though the forces of evil – even when they are considered guardians of the people – cannot destroy this faith. Yet the powers that be are going to try it. They will fail.

Participate in the powers of contemporary Holy Week! They can strengthen your faith; enhance your trust in God; and bring you, with full knowledge, to live forever in the Body of Christ Jesus. Amen!

Tuesday in Holy Week, March 27 (John 12:20-36)

PG Somerset

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say-- 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

What is it to hear angels speak to us? Think about what angels might say to you. Love, be happy, don't fear death, trust in the Lord, smile...these days will pass, mourn...these days will pass. Would you want to hear angels talk to you? I tell my children that God will only give them as much as he feels they can bear. Are those the words of an angel? Maybe.

We can be angels to one another. When we speak from our hearts to someone whose heart is open, we are speaking in the language of angels. When we listen in faith and trust we can hear angels speaking to us. Angels help alert people to the fact that the Lord is here and now in our midst. As we get ready to enter the Easter Season, try thinking of how through the resurrection you can be an angel, and then act upon it.

Prayer. Gracious and loving God, angels are all around us day in and day out. Guide these celestial beings and bring them into our lives. Amen.



Wednesday in Holy Week, March 28 (John 13:21-32)

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At supper with his friends, Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples-- the one whom Jesus loved-- was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. 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."

Holy Week is moving along. The hour of Jesus' death is closing in on him. He's gathered with his disciples for a meal. He has already washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-20). In the midst of this meal that follows the foot washing, which in John takes place on the evening prior

to Passover (for Jesus is the Passover Lamb), Jesus reveals that one of them sharing in the meal will betray him. Peter and the Beloved Disciple want to know who Jesus is speaking of. Who would do such a thing? Surely not them. I'm wondering if they are asking the question because they're not sure if Jesus means them. All that Jesus will say is that the one to whom he gives the bread dipped in the dish (what is in the dish we're not told -- is it wine or oil or some other part of the traditional meal?). Whatever it is Jesus gives the bread to Judas Iscariot, says something to him, and Judas leaves. The other disciples aren't sure what it is that Jesus has said. They have their theories, and they think nothing of it. Could it be that they're still wondering if Jesus could be speaking of them.

As is so often true with Jesus the story of the betrayal is a complicated one. Judas is going to do a dirty deed, but is it necessary? We have word here that Jesus' spirit is troubled. But why? Is he concerned about his own death or Judas' betrayal? If his concern is with Judas, is it because of what the betrayal leads to? Or is it because he loves Judas and can't bear to see Judas suffer like this? These have been perennial questions. It is difficult to make sense of Judas' betrayal. Why would someone who knew Jesus so well do this? Of course, John says that Satan led him to do this. But does this get Judas off the hook? After all, he was likely playing with fire here. Besides, what would have happened had Judas not acted as he did? Where would that leave the rest of our history? After all, Jesus himself says that the betrayal leads to him being glorified, and God through him. So, in the end, everything works out! Right?

The questions keep coming. After all, it's only Wednesday. We still have much to discover about this whole thing. But, as we consider these passages along the way to Good Friday and Easter, it is fitting to ask what they say to us. In what ways am I a betrayer? We like to vilify Judas, but is there some of Judas in each of us? If we say no, are we deceiving ourselves? This kind of self-examination can prove rather self-defeating. We can easily adopt the view that we are of little value to God or anyone else. So, yes, there is some of Judas in us, but also a bit of Peter and the Beloved Disciple, Thomas and Mary Magdalene (yes, we need the courage of Mary). We can also take heart in the sense that Jesus loved Judas, even if he was the betrayer. No one it would seem is beyond redemption.

Prayer. Gracious God, you sent your only Son to die on the cross for us. May we always have the courage that he had to endure such suffering and pain. In your name we pray. Amen.



Maundy Thursday, March 29 (John 13:1-17, 31b-35)

The Rev. Ray Michener

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's

feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. "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. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

St. John tells us the story of Jesus' desire to have a final communal meal with his disciples. During the meal Jesus demonstrates for them exactly what it means to be a servant to others no matter what position or title we hold. Jesus moves from the position of host to that of servant as he moves to wash their feet — a demonstration of his ability to assume the lowest place of servitude and humility.

This is not done to demand we humiliate ourselves before a world that refuses to comprehend the true meaning of justice and mercy, but to show the disciples and us how deeply God cares about us and the creation: enough to kneel down, wash our feet, and demonstrate how dearly we are held and honored in the heart of God, and how dearly we are to honor all people in our hearts and by our actions.

Prayer. Lord Christ, as you knelt at the feet of your disciples to wash their feet, give us the same courage and strength to understand that service to others is not a humiliating act, rather it is our being lifted by your Spirit to call the world into acts of respect, justice, and love for all people. Amen.



Good Friday, March 30 (John 18:1-19:42)

The Right Rev. Kevin S. Brown

Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed. Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor." When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and

the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced." After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

A friend once asked me, in the midst of a deep and far-ranging conversation about faith, "Why do Christians call Good Friday 'good' after what happened to Jesus that day?"

It is a fair question. As today's lesson from John 18 and 19 relates--and as the other gospels also record in great detail--the original Good Friday was a ghastly day of betrayal, abandonment, brutality, lies, torture, pain, and death. Every year I reread the lesson again, slowly. The horrors of this day are overwhelming, and I risk becoming numb to them. No wonder many prefer to ignore the pain and pass straight to the celebrations of Easter Sunday. Good Friday is certainly grisly and grim.

And yet, for over 2,000 years faithful Christians have steadfastly refused to become numb. Quite the opposite--we look unflinchingly into the gruesomeness of Jesus' Passion and right to the cross itself and proclaim, "We see God." We dare call this day "good" because it reveals--in unambiguous emotional and physical terms every person of every era can grasp--the depths and lengths of God's unrelenting love for humankind. Love is a fierce power, and it is not afraid to encounter and rebuke even the most depraved hurts humanity will contrive. Love is brave, obedient, and true, even to death. To grasp the reach of God's love, we must remember and remember and remember again the cross on which he hung. There, we see God, and we know that it must be good.

Prayer. *Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold us 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.*



Holy Saturday, March 31 (Matthew 27:57-66)

The Rev. Ron Gerber

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

They didn't want it to end like this, with Jesus dead and buried. What was it like for Mary and the Beloved Disciple and the others to go on living when all hope was gone and all that they had loved was lost? Maybe we know something of what it was like on that first Holy Sabbath, to be enfolded in the dark and broken places of our lives ... the loss of someone dear to us, whose absence we fear we will never be able to bear ... a terrifying diagnosis ... not knowing where our child is ... a shattering reality that we had no idea was coming out way.

Prayer. God help us pray through the darkness and pain of this Holy Sabbath until our Creator God bends down to kiss life back into God's Beloved Child. God help us imagine how the sharp jagged pieces of our lives might fit together in some new pattern that we could never have dared to dream. God, whose love is beyond what we can imagine and whose power we cannot comprehend, show us your glory as far as we can grasp it, and shield us from knowing more than we can bear. God, wait with us in the darkness, until, with Christ, we greet the awesome beauty of your new day. Amen.



Easter: Day of Resurrection (John 20:1-18)

The Rev. Jeffrey A. Ross

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

One of my favorite poets is George Herbert. First and foremost he was a faithful pastor and his dedication shines through in his poetry. One of his more famous works is Easter Wings:

Easter Wings

by George Herbert

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne
And still with sicknesses and shame.
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

Easter is about more than just the resurrection of one man, even the Son of God. Easter is about the fuller meaning of that Resurrection—not just that God died and rose for us, but also that through his rising, we too, are raised to new life. In the death and resurrection, God has removed all obstacles between the Divine and human and shown us the path to the fullness of the Kingdom of God—available here and now in this life and in the life to come!

Prayer. Alleluia! Christ is risen! May we proclaim the resurrection by letting ourselves be raised to new and deeper levels of compassion and service! May we reveal more fully in word and action that the Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

