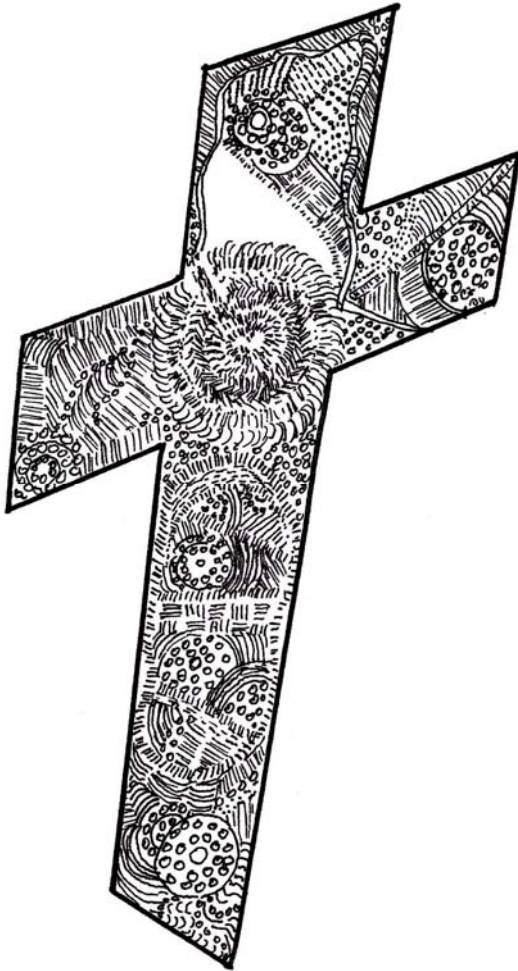


2012 Lenten Devotional



Church of the Ascension
12 West 11th Street
New York, NY 10011

“The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting”

- *The Book of Common Prayer, 1979, pp. 264-265).*

The Spiritual Development Committee would like to thank those who volunteered their time to write a passage for this booklet. May the reflections presented here help guide you through a prayerful and holy Lent.



Wednesday, February 22, 2012

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

On this first day of Lent, we will each be reflecting on what kind of “personal Lent” this will be for us. In reading today’s passages, I am especially struck by the theme of the heart. Psalm 51 describes it best in asking for God to “create in me a clean heart” and to “renew a right spirit within me.” No matter how well we think we are doing in living out our Christian faith, we are each charged with the need to ask for forgiveness daily from the God who never leaves us and to be made new.

How we “return to God with all our heart,” as Joel bids we do, opening the deepest depths of our inner selves, is where the Matthew gospel reading really takes root. It is the infamous edict not to practice piety in order to be seen by others but to pray, fast and give alms in secret. The loving, ever-present God already knows you intimately from the outside in. He knows what you do, when and how you do it! This Lenten time allows us to open ourselves up in secret to God to become the true Lord of our lives, daily being quiet and alone with God. While we have need for and desire the community worship of our church, Lent provides a time of profound self-discovery through prayer, repentance and renewal. Allow God’s steadfast love into your heart and see the joy he brings light up your life.

~ Zillah Kisswany



Thursday, February 23, 2012

Habakkuk 3:1-18 / Psalm 37: 1-42
Philemon 3: 12-21 / John 17: 1-8

I need to make a brief confession. I've spent as much time with the psalms as I have training for the New York City Marathon! Though I am grateful that we recite or sing them every Sunday, this hasn't much moved me to read them as part of my own spiritual practice. As part of my Lenten discipline, I thought I would focus on that which I would normally ignore.

But today's reading is filled with such wisdom on taking the long view that I can't help wondering why I haven't been spending more time with the psalms! "Do not be envious of those who do wrong"; "Trust in the Lord and do good"; "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him"; "Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it only leads to evil."

The psalms show our spiritual ancestors (and, us, really) at our worst and our best. But what I find encouraging about that is their honesty. I **have** felt envious of those who get away with doing awful things. Sometimes I **do** find satisfaction in being angry. And I certainly need copious reminders to trust in God and do good.

If the all-knowingness of God means anything, it means that God sees us as we are and **not** how we hope we are appearing. This would be frightening if God's way of seeing each of us was not with a love that overwhelms.

~ *Stephen P. Hagerty*



Friday, February 24, 2012

Ezekiel 18:1-4 / Psalm 35
Philippians 4:1-9 / John 17: 9-19

The reading today from John is a beautiful example of intercessory prayer, and we should use its example in our own prayer.

In intercessory prayer, we stand before God, and pray for others. Our reading today shows us Jesus praying an intercessory prayer to his Father to protect those closest to him; his followers, his believers, his disciples. He asks for them to be kept safe after he is no longer there to protect them as they continue to go out into the world to teach The Word.

“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.”

This is a very comforting passage. It is so loving and protective. Jesus prayed so intentionally to God, to protect and care for those closest to him, just as I do for those whom I love and hold dearest in my life. I feel compelled to pray every day for the peace and well being of the whole world and I feel some concern that to pray specially for those in my life is a little self serving. When I read this I'm reminded that Jesus did it too.

Beyond our own daily prayers, Ascension has a prayer group that asks us to pray for the special needs of others, we have healing prayer at the side altar that is intentionally for others and for ourselves, and we pray the Prayers of the People.

As Jesus prayed, so should we.

~ *Sibyl Piccone*



Saturday, February 25, 2012

Ezekiel 39: 21-29 / Psalm 42 & 43

Philippians 4:10-20 / John 17: 20-26

The Latin phrase *e pluribus unum*, or "Out of many – one," has appeared on every coin minted by the U.S. Treasury since the late 1800s. *E pluribus unum* is a perfect description of the message Jesus gives in today's Gospel lesson. Jesus prays not only for the unity of his disciples, but for those who will believe His message through His disciples. Jesus is "praying forward" for future generations of Christians, that in their (and our) belief, we may all be one body through Christ.

Jesus' call for unity is an important lesson for us to hear today. Do we view ourselves as one with our Christian brothers and sisters not only at Ascension, but throughout the world? Are we able to work through differences of thought and opinion, dissatisfaction and disappointment to truly hear Jesus' message that all Christians must live in unity and oneness? Do we "pray forward" thinking not only of ourselves and the immediate needs and wants, but for future generations or other churches and Christian communities throughout the world?

As we approach a new chapter at Ascension, we must look forward and pray for our unity, as one body, to guide us through our upcoming changes. And we must remember that we are not only praying for the immediate needs of our church, but for future generations of parishioners who will continue to worship Jesus, in unity as one body of Christians, just as Jesus, on his last day of earthly life prayed for future generations of believers.

~ Ned Fitch



Monday, February 27, 2012

Genesis 37:1-11 / Psalms 41, 44, 52
1 Cor. 1:1-19/ Mark 1:1-13

Recall to Gain Redemption

Currently there is an e-mail floating around that God has issued a recall notice “regardless of make or year due to a serious defect of the heart. This is due to a malfunction in the original prototype unit, code name Adam and Eve . . .”

Biblical narrative reveals a lot about human beings – our infinite possibilities, our staggering warts, our emotions and our responses to our environment. In today’s Genesis text, jealousies, anger and rage in Joseph’s family interactions are on display. Paul admonishes the Church at Corinth for their vacuous and inconsequential arguments over who was baptized by him and who was not and urges them to focus on the power of God’s love for them. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus hears God’s voice after baptism, but is immediately driven into the wilderness of the world, where the community of angels gives him cover from the demons. These same angels reside with us. The poetry of today’s Psalms embraces a range of human emotions.

The e-mail concludes “The Repair Technician, JESUS, has most generously offered to bear the entire burden of the staggering cost of these repairs. There is no additional fee required.”

In this Lenten period we are encouraged to “occupy” ourselves examining our behaviors and interactions blooming in this current toxic spring.

~ Janet Fisher



Tuesday, February 28, 2012

Genesis 37:12-24 / Psalms 45, 47, 48
1 Cor. 1:20-31/ Mark 1:14-28

When you come to knowing God, the initiative lies on His side. If He does not show Himself, nothing you can do will enable you to find Him. And, in fact, He shows much more of Himself to some people than to others—not because He has favourites, but because it is impossible for Him to show Himself to a man whose whole mind and character are in the wrong condition. Just as sunlight, though it has no favourites, cannot be reflected in a dusty mirror as clearly as in a clean one.

You can put this another way by saying that while in other sciences the instruments you use are things external to yourself (things like microscopes and telescopes), the instrument through which you see God is your whole self. And if a man's self is not kept clean and bright, his glimpse of God will be blurred—like the Moon seen through a dirty telescope.

~ C.S. Lewis, from *Mere Christianity*



Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Genesis 37:25-36 / Psalms 49, 53
1 Cor. 2:1-13/ Mark 1:29-45

When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' - Mark 1:37-38

This is Jesus' remarks to a few apostles who had come looking for him after a long day of teaching and healing. It seems as if hearing the "Everyone is searching for you" isn't exactly news. In fact the implication in his reply is that this is exactly what he expects and desires. His seemingly casual response really seems to indicate that he will simply continue to replicate the teaching and healing in other places.

Jesus will move on, proclaiming the message, that's the plan he will execute repeatedly.

It seems that the ultimate goal is to incite the feelings of all of the crowds in all the towns to lead them to search for him continually. And our part is to participate in the searching. How?

Not through our human efforts, but through the workings of the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul puts it in another of today's readings: "...for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."

Later this year, we will embark as a Parish on a search for a new Rector. But let us use this Lenten season as a time to search first for Jesus in our hearts, so we may be led in our search by the Holy Spirit.

~ *Dennis Weiscopf*



Thursday, March 1, 2012

Genesis 39:1-23 / Psalms 19, 46
1 Cor. 2:14-3:15 / Mark 2:1-12

Once again we have a gospel narrative in which Jesus performs a miracle of healing. Or is it healings? Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins which is a spiritual healing. To prove to the doubting scribes, he commands the paralytic to stand and walk, which he does, constituting a physical healing. Upon witnessing this event, the entire crowd glorifies God, which is a communal healing, mending the rift between God and man. This also opens the hearts of the scribes, who Jesus heard in their hearts questioning his ability to forgive sins, an ability they thought to be the provenance of God alone.

Today this passage reminds us of Jesus' healing powers. It shows us that Jesus is here for all of us, modern day scribes and common men, and that all we need to do is be open to his love for us and through him we can start physical, spiritual and communal healing. Jesus has the power to give us courage even when paralyzed with fear, strength when rendered weak and immobile by physical ailments, to bring us closer to God at those times when we are catatonic in our hearts as we face God every day.

Ultimately, in this Gospel Jesus' healing powers are a tool to demonstrate to all that the Son of Man has the power to forgive sins. May we all come to be healed through Christ, have our sins forgiven, and become closer to God.

~ *Wayne Seifried*



Friday, March 2, 2012

Genesis 40:1-23 / Psalms 40, 54, 51
1 Cor 3:16-23 / Mark 2:13-22

In a society like ours that values personal liberty and choice—including harmful choices, for that matter—Paul’s question in today’s epistle carries some fairly loaded implications: “Don’t you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells within you?”

In particular, Paul’s question points to the idea that, despite the many tools we employ to try to justify our actions, self-destructive behavior isn’t merely self-destructive—it’s **God**-destructive.

As we continue on our journey of prayer, introspection and self-cleansing this Lententide, I invite you to revisit the difficult questions or choices that you may have been putting aside in recent days. Let’s face it: we all have a nagging itch or wound somewhere that yearns to be scratched or bandaged, no matter how much we try to ignore it. By opening up ourselves to God in our weakness, we can unlock the door to his healing and transformative power in our lives.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Amen.

~ *Ethan Mandel*



Saturday, March 3, 2012

Genesis 41:1-13 / Psalms 55, 138, 139
1 Cor 4:1-7 / Mark 2:23-3:6

"I do not even judge myself."

Have you ever been aware of the "self-talk" inside your head?

About a decade ago, I shared an office with three people; we were a largely happy bunch. But one day, in reaction to overwriting a file by mistake or some other electronic accident, I said in a dismissive rage: "Derek, you idiot!" I didn't even realize I'd said it out loud, but the whole buzzing office came to a standstill. I remember feeling badly that my staff heard me raise my voice in anger, which I'd never done in front of them. That wasn't exactly what bothered them, however.

"Is that how you usually talk to yourself?" my friend Mariko asked. I sheepishly admitted that sometimes I do. "That probably isn't the healthiest voice to have in your head," Kris said.

I've paid more attention to my self-talk since, but I still make self-judgments with words and in a tone that I would never direct toward anyone else. In fact, one time last year, I found myself saying angrily, "Derek, what kind of [expletive] loser talks to himself like that?" Even in my frustration I then had to laugh at the dark, spiraling irony.

Paul says it is the Lord who judges him ... and me. To set anyone's opinion of ourselves over God's is to give them a power and influence that belongs only to the one who loves us unconditionally. To separate ourselves from that love by our own self-judgment is perhaps an even greater sin. But see? I'm doing it again!

~ *Derek Baker*



Monday, March 5, 2012

Genesis 41:46-57 / Psalms 56, 57, 58, 64, 65
1 Cor 4:8-21 / Mark 3:7-19a

Genesis 41:46-57

Joseph has adjusted to life in Egypt and entered the service of the Pharaoh. After interpreting Pharaoh's dream, he stores up enough food for seven years that when the seven years of famine arrive there is enough grain in Egypt to feed the world. When the Egyptians cry to Pharaoh for bread he instructs them to go to Joseph and do what he says. Joseph has been given authority to handle the distribution of food for the entire nation.

Mark 3:7-19a

Jesus instructs his disciples to have a boat ready for him to escape the crowds of people so they won't crush him. He has been given such power to cure that so many people just want to touch him.

Another example of power demonstrated by Jesus is his ability to select twelve apostles and grant them the power to cast out demons and to proclaim God's message.

God grants some form of power to each of us. During this Lenten season may we discover what it is and learn how to use it to further God's cause.

~ *Lillie Burkhardt*



Tuesday, March 6, 2012

Genesis 42:1-17 / Psalm 62
1 Cor 5:1-8 / Mark 3:19b-35

“Out of the depths..” We have all been there. From the depths of our being we cry out in the depth of suffering – whether caused by health, finances, human relations, intellectual, psychological or spiritual crisis, or some vague and indefinable angst, we cry out. And often we feel that God does not hear us, or, if He does, He does not choose to answer. And, to make things worse, we have all received bad advice about suffering. We have been told not to be selfish, to stiffen the upper lip, to think of others. “Why do you complain? Think of poor so-and-so, who...” And, worst of all, we have been told that suffering is punishment for our sins.

But the Psalmist reassures us. Although no one can stand in the face of divine judgment, God forgives us. Having noted that, the poet turns to his anticipation of divine presence, waiting more eagerly for God than “those who watch for the morning.” We expect a very special encounter, even from the very depths.

Our Lord states that he has come to give us life “more abundantly.” The Greek term, “perisson,” denotes more than a cornucopia. It means “extraordinarily,” “remarkably,” “uncommonly,” “in a far superior manner.” It is more about “how than “much.” Perhaps our suffering is a part of this “abundant” life. And so we “wait” for the Lord.

~ *Liz Hill*



Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Genesis 41:18-28 / Psalm 72
1 Corinthians 5:6-6:8 / Mark 4: 1-20

The parable of the sower is one Sunday school story I vividly remember. I grew up in a place where rural landscapes were readily accessible, and my youthful imagination could easily visualize the margins of a field where rows of crops give way to patches of weeds and brambles, strips of roadside gravel and finally, asphalt. This parable still conjures specific visual memories for me.

I still experience the same nagging question that made this bucolic scene unsettling for me as a child and I am sure for its original hearers; “Where has the seed known as me fallen?” It is a poignant thought, our lives equated with something as small and seemingly insignificant as a seed. And what chance does the poor seed stand that falls on the blacktop?

I think here Mark shows Jesus, the Teacher, at his finest, calling his students to wrestle within themselves with vivid, relatable imagery. I think we all struggle with the easy trap of deciding for ourselves where we have been planted. For us church-goers, the ground is undoubtedly dark and rich. Rather, we should ask what part of the field we find ourselves in today. Our ears and hearts must be open to hear our Savior’s voice, guiding us to witness to His love to all who are near to hear it. We know the richness of the promise of God’s kingdom, and that should not be something we can keep a secret.

~ *David Colcher*



Thursday, March 8, 2012

Genesis 42:29-38 / Psalms 70, 71, 74
1 Corinthians 6:12-30 / Mark 4: 21-34

Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your 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.

Amen.



Friday, March 9, 2012

Genesis 43:1-15 / Psalms 70, 71, 74
1 Corinthians 6:12-30 / Mark 4: 21-34

In today's scripture, Jesus and his disciples got in a boat to head to the other side of the lake after a day of telling parables. A terrible windstorm approached, causing waves to break into the boat, filling it with water. Terrified, the disciples awakened Jesus, saying "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Last summer my brother and his wife lost everything they owned in a devastating tornado that hit Oklahoma City. I imagine as the storm winds howled and they fled for safety, Erik and Melanie's thoughts may have been similar to that of the disciples: "Don't You care that we are perishing?"

Today's reading is about trusting in God, not only when the going is good, but even more so when the storms of life roll in. These storms are all around us - cancer, unemployment, divorce, car accidents, and quite literally, tornadoes. Our natural tendency is to be afraid and hit the panic button, to awaken Jesus. However, our challenge and our call as Christians is to trust in God and have faith that He will calm the storms of our lives and say, "Peace! Be still!"

I will close with a quote from the devotional book He Was Only Twenty Four, by Dr. Alvin Rogness. "You and I are built for storms. We are not built for cozy, safe little harbors. The Lord is with us. With him, we have the kind of craft that can weather any storm..."

~ *Matthew Vermedahl*



Saturday, March 10, 2012

Genesis 43:16-34 / Psalms 23, 27, 75, 76
1 Corinthians 7:10-24 / Mark 5: 1-20

A common challenge within marriages and committed relationships arises when one is a “believer,” a church-goer, and the other wants to hold back. It was very frequent in Paul’s communities when becoming a believer meant a radical new way of life outside accepted social norms, and it may be equally radical today in our post-Christian, secular era. How does such a relationship remain grounded without coercion of one another?

Paul’s first counsel is not to separate: “For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband.” The English word “bless” means to make holy, and so, we could say the unbelieving one is blessed by the believing one. The older etymological root, however, is actually “blood,” as in the Old Testament sense of making the altar holy by the sprinkling of blood. Blood, in biblical usage, is a symbol of life force, which takes us into the nitty-gritty of how one’s life force becomes a blessing to another.

Through Baptism, Christ’s death and resurrection become the pattern of our life. Through it, we place our trust in never being separated from the love and grace of God that redeems whatever life may bring us. From it, we receive Christ’s power of transformation for our lives. It is out of this experience of God’s mercy, grace and love that we can then offer those closest to us the gift of acceptance, love, and nurture, trusting God to bind us in mutual holiness.

~ *The Rev. Deacon Sam Tallman*



Monday, March 12, 2012

Genesis 44:18-34 / Psalms 80, 77, 79
1 Corinthians 7:25-31 / Mark 5: 21-43

Via Negativa

Why no! I never thought other than
That God is that great absence
In our lives, the empty silence
Within, the place where we go
Seeking, not in hope to
Arrive or find. He keeps the interstices
In our knowledge, the darkness
Between stars. His are the echoes
We follow, the footprints he has just
Left. We put our hands in
His side hoping to find
It warm. We look at people
And places as though he had looked
At them, too; but miss the reflection.

~ R.S. Thomas



Tuesday, March 13, 2012

Genesis 45:1-15 / Psalm 78
1 Corinthians 7:32-40 / Mark 6: 1-13

Can you ever really go home again?

In this passage from Mark's gospel, we are told about Jesus' return to Nazareth, his hometown, and his teaching among the people with and around whom he had been raised. The big question: how would he be received? As it happens, not so well.

We've all experienced it: the pressure of going home, seeing old friends, family, classmates, who relate to us in a paradigm of our past. "They still treat me like I'm that awkward 14 year old." "Can't they see me for who I am *now* and not who I was?"

But are we not all guilty of this? Have we not pigeonholed others by how we have known them, and not by the possibility of what they are now or who they could be?

I see the citizens of Nazareth as having missed a golden opportunity. Yes, hindsight is 20/20. But had they had just a little faith, been open to Jesus of Nazareth as more than just that little kid they knew from down the block, imagine how differently this would have played out.

Today let us be open to the wonder and grace of experiencing anew those we know and have known well and being surprised by what possibilities they may bring to our lives. Just have a little faith.

~ Michael Surabian



Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Genesis 45:16-28 / Psalms 81, 82

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 / Mark 6:13-29

The death of John the Baptist has to be one of the most gruesome subjects in the Bible. It's notable for its particularly garish, nightmarish depiction of the young woman dancing to please her mother, the manipulated request of the queen, and the cowardice of the king. Noteworthy, especially, is Herod's motive: He's sworn an oath to the girl, his queen's daughter, in front of his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. Whatever she wants, up to half his kingdom, he'll grant her – but all she wants is the head of John the Baptist on a platter. It's manipulation at its height, ugly and brutal, the opposite of the Kingdom. What makes it all possible is Herod's fear of his audience, his need for the "praise of men" above the "praise of God." The Gospels frequently give us the contrast between the "honor that comes from men" and the honor that is of God. I don't think this subject will ever leave us. In our age of image propounded upon us far beyond the concepts of the ancients, we can't afford to leave it behind in our own thinking. Jesus has said to His own brethren who taunted Him about making His public image, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready." It's always time to consider the inner reality of God's truth more powerfully than that which pulls us only into considerations of image in the eyes of others.

~ *Janine Economides*



Thursday, March 15, 2012

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34 / Psalms 42, 43, 85, 86

1 Corinthians 9:1-15 / Mark 6:30-46

When...? Why....? “Where is your God?” Answer: Hope.
Is it just that simple?

It can't be, can it? I want to flip the pages of my Bible to see if there's more to it.

Annoyingly simple answers do not always sit well with me. When I was little, as my mom cooked and I would ask, “What's for dinner?” Her response: “Food.” *Cue eye roll, grumble and exit.* I'm going to need more than that.

But, what if “food” or “hope” is not *the* answer, but a step? Sometimes we need a step to get over the initial hurdle. The rest of the line says “Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.” Wherever I am, with all my questions, God knows I am coming back, but it is on me to trust Him.

This Lent my prayer is that I can let go of the complicated and trust that hope is enough.

~ Barbara Matovu



Friday, March 16, 2011

Genesis 47:1-26 / Psalms 88, 91, 92
1 Corinthians 9:16-27 / Mark 6:47-56

In this passage from Mark, I am reminded of two very important convictions for which we, as Christians, should all be equipped: faith and responsibility. With the birth of my daughter this past summer, I suddenly felt the weight of being responsible for another human being. Yes, as a daughter, wife, stepmother, granddaughter, friend, and colleague, I have felt the keen sense of duty, loyalty, commitment, and obligation, but as a mother, I feel the weight of being responsible for someone unconditionally. Jesus in this passage here is seen as rescuer, healer, miracle worker, leader, the wearer of many hats, but what comes through is his sense of responsibility for everyone he meets or touches, whether it be his own disciples or the sick and dying that were laid before him.

Mark writes that all who touched Jesus's cloak were healed, and that the people all gathered wherever He went. People had such faith in His power and authority, a precedent we should all follow. As Christians, faith can carry us through not only difficult times as we see with the sick in this passage but also the times when we feel vulnerable or frightened as the disciples must have felt in their boat far from shore. However, faith also enriches the times when we are joyous and hopeful. I aspire to teach my daughter these two very important intentions, faith and responsibility, that is our duty as Christians.

~ Jennifer Lippert



Saturday, March 17, 2012

Genesis 47:27-48:7 / Psalms 87, 90
1 Corinthians 10:1-13 / Mark 7:1-23

In reading the scriptural passages for today, I'm reminded of a Hebrew word: **KAVANAH**. It means *intention* or *direction of the heart* when one is engaged in prayer or sacred ritual.

I think Jesus and Paul are admonishing their respective audiences to be mindful of *Kavanah*. Jesus seems impatient with the Pharisees for holding fast to the traditions of the elders because in doing so they "leave the commandment of God." What is the direction of their hearts? Jesus quotes Isaiah about such "hypocrites, "This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

In their smug, nearsighted belief that they hold the key to salvation because of their scrupulous adherence to ritualistic laws, they overlook the elemental needs and suffering of the common man.

Paul points out to the Corinthians that baptism and partaking of the Lord's Supper are not enough to guarantee salvation, any more than corresponding acts sufficed for the ancient Hebrews. He warns his followers against being overly confident in this regard.

What is the direction of their hearts, what are their intentions and *what are ours*: are they tightly focused inward on the rubrics and "staging" of sacramental ceremony in the belief that such involvement alone saves or are our hearts mindful of the fundamental precepts inherent within the sacraments? Are our intentions to incorporate these precepts into our daily lives thus influencing how we think and behave toward the world and our fellow man?

The answer seems obvious. Yet, I think as with the Pharisees and Corinthians we need to be reminded from time to time.

~ Candace Lombardi



Monday, March 19, 2012

Genesis 49:1-28 / Psalm 89
1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1 / Mark 7:24-37

Sons are blessed out of order? Why has God forsaken David? If the blessings from God are only for the Jews, why did Jesus heal the Gentile's daughter?

It has taken me a lifetime to (grudgingly) accept that everything in God's world is not necessarily going to be ordered to my liking, or in a way that I deem appropriate. Which is a very good thing for humanity, actually.

If it had, the many blessings I have received would not have occurred. Nor would the losses I have sustained. And yet, often my losses have led to more spiritual growth and a more understanding and kinder heart than my gains.

The great thing about getting older, though, is that I can look back and see how many of God's plans for me have been long in the making. My arrival in the US started in Connecticut because God knew I couldn't have dealt with New York City right away. My alcoholic recovery was started at least eight years before I got sober. And I needed to get sober so that I could become a part of Ascension (there was never another church for me.) And so on.

So, if life seems to be dealing you a tough hand right now, just wait a bit, because God is probably preparing you for the next right thing to move you forward. Or perhaps for a blessing you are not even expecting or of which you might dream.

As Paul writes in Romans: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."(Romans 8:28)

~ Barbara Head



Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Genesis 49:29-50:14 / Psalms 94, 95
1 Corinthians 11:17-34 / Mark 8:1-10

Many of you know that I grew up in rural Iowa. My experiences there were so different than my life now. Of course I'm older, but living in an agricultural environment is very different than living in the fast paced urban environment that I live in now. Here there are several restaurants on every block, access to mass transit that will take you anywhere in the city, and access to every national chain you can think of.

Instead of stores and restaurants, I lived in a patchwork of corn and soybean fields. Farmers raised cattle, hogs, and sheep. Interestingly, I was surrounded by so much abundance, but we had very few food options like I have today. My town had one diner and one grocery store. However, I still have fond memories of the food that was served at home, church socials, and community events.

When I think about food and my hometown, I instantly remember the many great recipes from our church's cookbook—The Gowrie United Methodist Women Quilting Bee Cookbook (1982). My mom gave me a copy of this incredible cookbook a few years ago, and it is one of my treasured possessions. It has a great recipe for Monster Cookies, hints on serving 100 people, and helpful canning advice. Plus a few short proverbs like this one:

Fear less – Hope more, Eat less – Chew more, Whine less –
Breathe more, Talk less – Say more, Hate less – Love more
And all good things are yours.

~ *Steve Hubbard*



Wednesday, March 21, 2012

Genesis 50:15-26 / Psalm 119
1 Corinthians 12:1-11 / Mark 8:11-26

I don't know if people rolled their eyes in ancient Palestine, but you can almost see Jesus rolling his as he "sighed deeply in his spirit" when the Pharisees, the House Republicans of their day, demand a sign from heaven to test him right after he fed 4,000 people with only seven loaves of bread. "C'mon, really?!" you can imagine saying in his place, "What more do you need?"

If the earthly Jesus expressed the kind of exasperation you or I might with doubters and naysayers, the divine Jesus does not seem reluctant to offer sign after sign, at least to my latent inner Pharisee. Whereas Jesus the man might've said, "Seriously? I've given you a beautiful and loving family, including a brand-new baby, health in the face of a deadly disease, dozens of friends, material comfort beyond your needs, a beautiful place to worship, and countless other blessings in your daily life and those of the people you care and pray for. And you want more signs?" But the Lord Christ does not seem at all perturbed to heap one sign on top of the other, to add blessings and miracles small and large in what seems an almost embarrassing stream of gifts, good fortune, and benedictions, a potent reminder that God provides for us as he did for the four thousand followers in the desert, in everything from the most spectacular wonders to our simple "daily bread" of life. And all that appears to be required in return is a bit of faith and some prayer.

~ *Kevin Lippert*



Thursday, March 22, 2012

Exodus 1:6-22 / Psalm 73
1 Corinthians 12:12-26 / Mark 8:27-9:1

In today's passage from Mark, we read how Peter first identifies Jesus as the Messiah, and then, a moment later, rebukes Jesus for talking about the rejection, death, and resurrection he would have to undergo. It takes chutzpah to rebuke the Messiah, but it's not hard to understand why Peter was so upset. He was thinking in rational, human terms, expecting the Messiah to come as a triumphant political leader. Instead, Jesus turns the world on its head by delivering the shocking, completely incomprehensible news of his impending suffering, death, and resurrection.

There have been many times in my life when I've felt like Peter, times when all my hopes and expectations went awry. Times when I've thought, "This is not the way things are supposed to go." If it were up to Peter, maybe Jesus wouldn't have suffered and died. But then there would have been no crucifixion ... and no resurrection.

Jesus' radical teaching reminds us not to limit our vision to our own narrow existence. He offers us a new path, a path that is difficult but that leads to far greater fulfillment. And when we suffer, he invites us to transform our suffering just as his suffering was transformed.

I pray that in times of anxiety, disappointment and loss, I may be given the strength to take up my cross, and be reminded to set my mind on divine things.

~ Meredith Ward



Friday, March 23, 2012

Exodus 2:1-22 / Psalm 107
1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3 / Mark 9:2-13

Paul tells us in I Corinthians that we are “the body of Christ and individually members of it.” God has appointed us different roles: apostles, prophets, teachers, forms of leadership, and others.

I contemplate this as we move through 2012. We will be saying goodbye to Fr. Andrew and Lynda, and entering a new chapter in the life of Ascension. We will be on our own for a while, as we enter the search process to call the twelfth Rector of Ascension. As we do that, each of us will have a special role to perform, based on our special and individual talents. We are blessed to have such wonderful people in our parish family! And as we work together, we will work as one in the body of Christ, striving for the greater gifts. “And I will show you a still more excellent way.”

~ *Mary Gaillard*



Saturday, March 24, 2012

Exodus 2:23- 3:15 / Psalm 33
I Corinthians 13: 1-13 / Mark 9: 14- 29

Today's scripture readings include one of the most familiar and best-loved passages from the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. Here Paul focuses on the gift of love, its essential role in our lives, and how it supersedes every other admirable quality we might possess, including faithfulness and generosity: "...if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions...but do not have love, I gain nothing."

After making the case for the supremacy of love, Paul goes on to describe its qualities: patience and kindness are chief among them. He tells us "it is not irritable or resentful; it...hopes all things, endures all things." This may seem like a tall order in some circumstances, but Paul lets us know our patience will be rewarded. He writes, "For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.... Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."

I believe it is God who knows us fully. During this Lent, my goal is to draw closer to God, recognizing that I can have confidence that his love embraces all that I am. Drawing closer to God surely begins by expressing love more completely in all my interactions with the world, keeping in mind Paul's guidance for a fuller understanding of what love in action means.

~ Dorothy Dinsmoor



Monday, March 26, 2012

Exodus 4:10-31 / Psalm 31, 35
I Corinthians 14: 1-19 / Mark 9: 30-41

In today's passage Jesus makes three crucial points. He allows non-disciples to do miracles in His Name declaring: "he who is not against us is for us" and promising a reward to those who help others in His Name; He teaches that whoever desires to be first should be the "servant of all"; and He predicts His death and resurrection.

In the first teaching, Jesus states that everyone that does the smallest thing to help others in his Name is helping Him, whether he is an apostle or a disciple. The crucial determinant of whether he is "on our side" is that help is given in His Name. Action taken truly in His Name defines and directs energy and, making it helpful to God. There is no exclusivity to the apostles (and by inference to the church or even Christians) in doing the right thing in the Name of God!

Second, Jesus teaches us that the world is upside down. As the apostles argue among themselves about greatness in the Kingdom, Jesus tells them that the greatest is the servant of all. This is a very radical position. Can we embrace this teaching? Even after two thousand years of Christianity, we live in a world where the world considers the servant of all as one of the lowest possible rank.

Third, Jesus predicts His death and resurrection. Without these two events, Christianity would be like any other religion. Accepting the ultimate humiliation in death by crucifixion, Jesus shows absolute acceptance of the Will of the Father and love for his creation. His Resurrection defines the ultimate positive resolution and hope for this upside-down world.

~ *Nicholas Economides*



Tuesday, March 27, 2012

Exodus 5:1-6:1 / Psalms 124, 125, 126
I Corinthians 14: 20-40 / Mark 9: 42-50

“Who is the Lord that I should heed his voice...?”

Pharaoh arrogantly posed this question to Moses and Aaron in the pages of Exodus. Yet one might consider its relevance in our lives today. Throughout the millennia, most of humanity has made their relationship with God at once both ambiguous and ambivalent.

Today's lections attempt to explicate the relational nature of humankind with our Creator and also to focus our attention on its bifurcated state. God's intent seems quite explicit as evidenced by the verse from Psalm 121, “The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in from this time forth for evermore”. The incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ served to further clarify the depth of God's love and concern for us. The Pauline and Marcan exhortations against causing another to sin and not allowing everyone to have their rightful place in the corporate church are meant to help us “keep on track” in our relationship with God.

Let us therefore attempt each day to get closer in relationship to our Heavenly Father and to “be at peace with one another”. (Mark 9:50)

~ *John Laubach*



Wednesday, March 28, 2012

Exodus 7:8-24 / Psalms 128, 129, 130
2 Corinthians 2: 14-3:6 / Mark 10: 1-16

The many sources given to us each day of these Lenten devotions have always caused my mind to boggle, and so after reading each of them over I try to concentrate on two of their thoughts, which are beautiful verse or moral teachings that I can try to remember in my daily life.

None of us will be equally moved or uplifted by every word of them, but the minutes spent sampling each I find are not wasted. For instance, there is the drama of how Aaron struck the River Nile with his rod, causing the water to turn to blood to rebuke Pharaoh. "Let my people go", said he. (Not to mention what came next: a plague of frogs.) Then, who but Paul would have thought of comparing the Word of God to "The aroma of Christ," He added, "We are not peddlers, like so many, of God's word, but as men of sincerity, commissioned by God."

The Bible can be contradictory ("For thy God am a jealous God"), but He is also merciful, as in Psalm 130: "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?"

~ *Arthur Anderson*



Thursday, March 29, 2012

Exodus 7:25-8:19 / Psalms 140, 142
2 Corinthians 3:7-18 / Mark 10: 17-31

Be free, though you are bound in a body, and for Christ's sake show forth obedience in your freedom. But also be prudent in your simplicity, lest you be plundered. Love humility in all your activities, that you be delivered from the imperceptible snares that are always found outside the pathways of humble men. Do not reject afflictions, for through them you will enter into the knowledge of the truth; and do not fear temptations, because therein you will find precious things. Pray that you enter not into the temptations of the soul, but with all your strength prepare yourself for those of the body. Without these you cannot draw nigh to God, because divine rest is laid up within them.

~ St. Isaac the Syrian



Friday, March 30, 2012

Exodus 9:13-35 / Psalms 141, 143
2 Corinthians 4:1-12 / Mark 10: 32-45

In Corinthians 4 we are told to think about God's light in our hearts shining forth. When we make more and more room for this light by getting rid of the hiding, dishonesty (perhaps most especially from ourselves) and "craftiness" (wanting to work things out to our own advantage), then we have more room to experience trusting God's mercy. We are not asked to live a life that circumvents trouble, and in fact we will encounter trouble "on every side." Thus, the way to live our lives fully is to welcome the direct experience of life—not just the glorious parts but also all the trouble, slings and arrows, and even doubts that we encounter. Knowing God's mercy is always, irrevocably, held out to us—gives us the courage to fully live this human life.

~ *Sarah Standing*



Saturday, March 31, 2012

Exodus 10:21-11:8 / Psalms 42, 43
2 Corinthians 4:13-18 / Mark 10: 46-52

*The blind man stood in the road and cried,
Cryin' , O Lord, don't turn your back on me*
- Traditional Spiritual

In today's Gospel story Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, sits by the road leading out of Jericho. There he hears the commotion of a large crowd approaching and is told that Jesus is coming. He cries out, "Jesus . . . have mercy on me!" Some in the crowd sternly try to quiet him, but he continues shouting, "Jesus . . . have mercy!" Jesus stops still and says, "Call him here." When Bartimaeus springs forward, Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" "My teacher, let me see again," he pleads, and Jesus responds, "Go, your faith has made you well." In that moment Bartimaeus's sight is restored, and he joins the crowd following Jesus.

Sighted or not, we live in darkness. Selfishness and self-will obscure our vision. Fears blind us. Our tiny pixel in time and space is going out. We too cry "Jesus, have mercy!" Will He stop for us? Is He calling us? Faith, we are told, brings Bartimaeus in his desolation a glimmer of possibility and the courage to defy the stern voices that would relegate him to despair. Can we catch that glimmer? Can we find that strength? Will we spring forward into the light?

~ John Merryman



Monday, April 2, 2012

Lamentations 1:1-12 / Psalms 51, 69
2 Corinthians 1:1-7 / Mark 11: 12-25

My lens to the divine often focuses scripture in a way that is relevant to what I am experiencing on the day that I read it. Today, as I sit in my office at NYU Abu Dhabi, waiting for students to come for counseling sessions, I see this Gospel, filled with very human emotions. Jesus curses the fig tree, turns tables at the temple, and frets about forgiveness.

So much emotion is coming from Jesus. We see anger, “may no one eat fruit from you again,” and “you have turned a house of prayer into a den of robbers.” We trust our faith, “If you have faith in God and say to this mountain, throw yourself into the sea, it will.” And perhaps some fear and anxiety, “You better forgive your brother or sister before you pray to God, or you might not receive God’s forgiveness.”

I see this range of emotions with students. Whether it is grief over a broken relationship, test taking anxiety, thoughts of killing themselves, or fear of leaving the security of parents for the uncertainty of adulthood.

Let us take time today to examine our emotions. Ask ourselves if we use anger to destroy or to change? Do we have trust in faith to see us through? Can we forgive one another? Let us focus our emotions today on loving one another, and through it feel the love of God. Amen.

~ *The Rev. Mark Hummell*



Tuesday, April 3, 2012

Lamentations 1:17-22 / Psalms 6, 12, 94
2 Corinthians 1:8-22 / Mark 11:27-33

In today's gospel, the chief priests, scribes, and elders ask Jesus by what authority he is doing these things. Jesus says He will tell them if they will answer one question, did the baptism of John come from heaven or human origin? It is a no-win situation for them: if they answer from heaven, He will ask why they didn't believe in John. If they answer from human origin, the crowd who believed in John will attack them. So they answer, "We do not know."

In the past I have thought disparagingly of the chief priests', scribes', and elders' inability to accept Jesus for who He is. How could they be so blind to the source of Jesus' authority? However, these feelings of superiority have disappeared. In fact, I identify with the chief priests, scribes, and elders. I am like them. I am them. I challenge Jesus' authority every day as I live my life... putting my will, the love of self, before my love of God. When I do not love God with all my heart am I not denying who Jesus is?

I wonder what questions Jesus would ask me if I met Him on the streets of NYC. I wonder if I would even recognize Him, since I sometimes judge people out of ignorance, by how they look. I pray that my eyes will be open to see Him when I meet him and my heart will be strong enough to acknowledge who I am.

~ Carol Conway



Wednesday, April 4, 2012

Lamentations 2:1-9 / Psalms 55, 74
2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11 / Mark 12:1-11

E Tenebris

Come down, O Christ, and help me! reach thy hand,
For I am drowning in a stormier sea
Than Simon on thy lake of Galilee:
The wine of life is spilt upon the sand,
My heart is as some famine-murdered land,
Whence all good things have perished utterly,
And well I know my soul in Hell must lie
If I this night before God's throne should stand.
"He sleeps perchance, or rideth to the chase,
Like Baal, when his prophets howled that name
From morn to noon on Carmel's smitten height."
Nay, peace, I shall behold before the night,
The feet of brass, the robe more white than flame,
The wounded hands, the weary human face.

~ *Oscar Wilde*



Thursday, April 5, 2012

Lamentations 2:10-18 / Psalms 102, 142, 143
1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32 / Mark 14:12-25

Let's imagine that we are at the Last Supper. The disciples are gathered around Jesus, quietly conversing. They reach across the table to dip their bread, their hands brushing against each other's hands, sharing the same bowl with him. The mood is solemn, yet comfortable and familiar. It is the holy ritual of the Passover feast that they have celebrated all their lives.

Then, into this sacred space, at this most intimate and holy meal, and in the midst of this perfect sacrifice, comes the stain of betrayal. "One of you will betray me, one who is eating with me."

We hear these words and a dreadful sorrow overcomes us. We begin to feel the weight of our own failings, our own shortcomings, our own doubts. We ask with some uncertainty, "Surely, not I?" If this betrayal is possible, where is our refuge?

Our refuge is in his perfect sacrifice. Because in the *same night* that Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread and blessed it, and gave it to them ... and to us. In the *same night* that Jesus was betrayed he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them ... and to us. In the *same night*, the ultimate betrayal and the ultimate forgiveness happened simultaneously!

I come before the Lord in my brokenness, in humility and faith, in the hope of God's grace and forgiveness. Amen.

~ Meredith Ward



Friday, April 6, 2012

Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-33 / Psalms 22, 40, 54, 95
1 Peter 1:10-20 / John 19:38-42

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o'er His body on the tree;
Then I am dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

~ Isaac Watts



Saturday, April 7, 2012

Lamentations 3:37-58 / Psalms 27, 88, 95
Romans 8:1-11

In this reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, intimacy jumped out. “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” But why would we? What are we afraid of? To begin with, we have a high priest who already knows us, “... before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare.” And who better than He is able to sympathize with our faults, for “we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are.” So why do we hesitate? This is a fear of intimacy, of being known, exposed fully. The word of God “is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” and we are fortunate that our high priest “is one who in every respect has been tested as we are.” Jesus was a man, fully human. He is sympathetic to us. So why be afraid?

As C.S. Lewis wrote, “Of His great humility God chose to be incarnate in a man of delicate sensibilities who wept at the grave of Lazarus, and sweated blood in Gethsemane. Otherwise we should have missed the great lesson that it is by his will alone that a man is good or bad, and that feelings are not, in themselves, of any importance... If God had been incarnate in a man of immense natural courage, that would have been for many of us almost the same as His not being incarnate at all.”

~ *Carol Conway*



Our gratitude to the members of Ascension who contributed to the creation of this year's devotional. A special thanks to Liz Hill for her fantastic editing assistance and Stephen Hagerty and Matthew Vermedahl for their publishing expertise.



