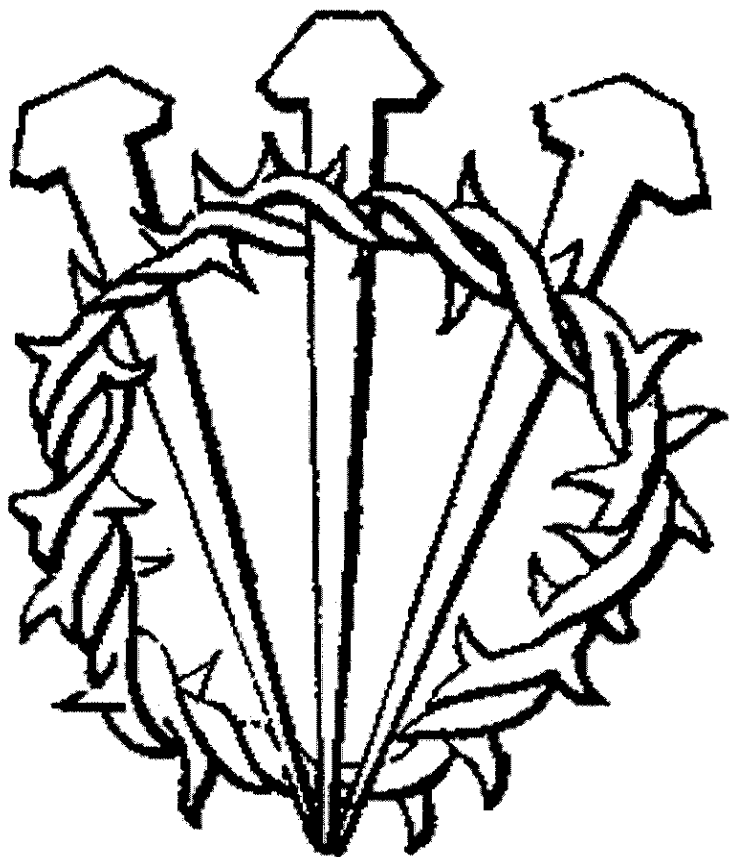


Lenten Devotional

2015



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

2015 Lenten Devotional Introduction

Welcome to the 2015 Church of the Ascension Lenten Devotional. This devotional is a reprint, from 2003. As you complete each day's readings and writings, we hope you will feel encouraged to sit with God's words and the words of our current and former fellows from Church of the Ascension.

Lent is a deeply spiritual time for each of us which takes meaning in as many unique ways as a snowflake that falls in February. The Spiritual Development Committee hopes you find the readings and writings helpful as you move through the Lenten season, and prepare your heart, mind and body for the Paschal Feast. Wherever you and God go on a journey over the next 40 days, we hope you are able to do so with an honesty, openness and willingness that allows God to touch you in ways which bring you closer to God, closer to yourself and closer to your fellows.

Thanks be to God.

The Spiritual Development Committee

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 2-17

& Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalms 103:8-14

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The first time I received ashes, I found myself smiling: the thumb which was making the

sign of the cross on my forehead was the same thumb which, several months before at my baptism, had made the same sign in the same place with chrism, to the words "you are marked as Christ's own forever."

Although the solemnities of Ash Wednesday can seem rather lugubrious, the readings for today are not about death, but reconciliation, literally "bringing together again." How can we use this season of Lent to reconcile ourselves with God? Some might give up chocolate or television or martinis, but the prophets have a different idea. "Rend your hearts and not your garments," advises Joel. Isaiah tells us that fasting and sackcloth and ashes are not much good unless we feed the hungry, clothe and house the poor. Jesus tells us quite specifically how to store up treasures in heaven. It's not about trying to appease God or bribe Him; His grace has made that moot.

Our lives may pass like the flowers of the field, but the love of the Lord is everlasting. God says, "return to me with all your heart," according to Joel. God wants to reconcile us with Himself, not because to dust we shall return, but because we are marked as Christ's own forever.

Paul S. Kahn

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

L u k e 9 : 1 8 - 2 5

P s a l m 1

In my mind, the key to these passages is choice and God's love.

In Deuteronomy 30:15,

God says, "I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil." We are offered the chance to dwell in the land of the Lord.

The choices involve looking at the world and at us. We can choose to look and listen to what is outside us and inside as well. With our eyes and hearts open, we will be able to see the world before us and the results of our choices, and sometimes those of others. We have the opportunity and responsibility to observe and try to determine the consequences of our choices, what the results may be for the whole world. We are offered life, a full and good life because of God's love. Of course, sometimes this takes great faith.

Because of Jesus and His love for us, we may choose to follow Him with our choice to say yes to life. We may choose to be open to love.

We may choose the way of the Lord, and reap the benefits of such a life, one that "brings forth fruit" rather than a life of want or withering, but one in which we will be loved and cared for.

Lisa Dunn

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:1-9a

Matthew 9:10-17

Psalms 51:1-10

When

Jesus told the Pharisees that his disciples

would fast after he was taken away from them, did that start the tradition of fasting for Lent? How did that tradition begin in the Christian church? Fasting as a way of preparing for a new life is a part of many traditions and religions at different times of the year. For some it has a great deal of meaning. I have never made strong connections to it myself.

His parables about not putting "new cloth onto an old garment" or putting "new wine into old bottles" add another dimension to the idea of preparation for rebirth — for his rebirth at Easter as well as my own. These ideas have immediate meaning for me after a recent move to both a new home and a new office.

This year I will try to make the most of Lent as a time of reflection, and of inner and outer cleansing as best I can. There is a feeling of hope and new energy in this as Easter and Spring approach. Spring cleaning isn't a bad thing!

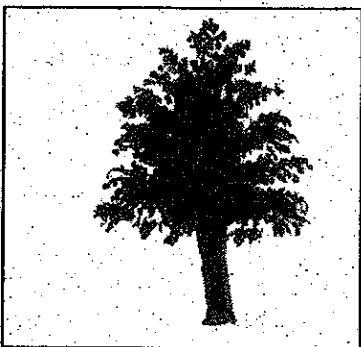
Buff Kavelman

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 58:9b-14

Luke 5:27-32

Psalms 86:1-11



Tree, 2

Savannah, 2003

I find the Isaiah text the most striking of the three passages. The psalm is, not surprisingly, a hymn in praise of the Lord. And the Gospel is one of many statements that Jesus

has come "to call sinners to repentance." But Isaiah states Jesus' "Summary of the Law," putting the two elements in reverse order. He exhorts his reader to "feed the hungry . . . and satisfy the needs of the wretched," and also to be "a restorer of houses in ruins" in order to find favor with God. Only then does he insist on formal duties like observing the Sabbath. For Isaiah, then, outreach leads to religious practices, not vice versa.

If he were with us today, he would be a volunteer at the food pantry and the shelter, and also a worker on Habitat for Humanity projects.

It has been my experience, too, that various outreach activities have led to a formal religious commitment completely abandoned shortly after I entered graduate school more than fifty-five years ago in preparation for a career in college teaching. A commitment to books, to teaching, to students, and to family replaced any vestigial attachment to transcendent values. We do not always realize what we're doing while we're doing it, and it was only later that I realized that these activities, like the shelter and food pantry I was involved with later, were forms of outreach and of worship, and that they could lead to something beyond.

Charles Hill

Monday of the First Week of Lent

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

Matthew 24: 31-46

Psalm 19: 7-14

The readings for today are direct, explicit and powerful. Often people say, "What does God want

from me?" How often have you heard that or, perhaps, said it yourself? These readings from Leviticus lay it on the line and there can be no doubt about what God expects from each of us, and how he wants us to live our lives. Each directive is clear and to the point. No one can say they do not understand what He meant.

In Matthew, the consequences of how you live your life are clearly stated. If you live a righteous life, you will be rewarded with eternal life. If you were not a righteous person, you will go away to eternal punishment. In addition to the "rules" stated in Leviticus, the reading from Matthew stresses being kind, caring, considerate of others and lending a helping hand wherever it is needed. He said it succinctly and clearly, "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." At Ascension, our outreach programs are an example of what God has instructed us to do and it is vital that we continue to support these programs.

The Psalm sums it all up and beautifully describes how we should live our lives and how we should help others. The final verse of Psalm 19 is a fitting closing to these readings:

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

Audrey Bird

Tuesday of the First Week of Lent

Isaiah 55:6-11

Matthew 6:7-15

Psalm 34:15-22

One thing that intrigues me about the Lord's Prayer is one little word, *daily*.

The word appears for the first time in the Greek language in the manuscripts of the New Testament, perhaps *invented* by one of the Evangelists. And it is a curious thing, too – for the Greek language already had a word or a phrase for expressing concepts like “every day” or “common” or “for today.” Perfectly good ones, in fact. But instead, someone chose a word whose meaning is *less clear*. Later usages of this word suggest a multiplicity of meanings: Give us today *ordinary bread*, our *common food*. Give us today the bread *necessary for existence, for our need*. Give us the bread *for today, for the current day*, or even *the bread for tomorrow, the bread of the future*.

St. Jerome translated it into Latin as *panis supersubstantialis* – bread beyond substance, or “supersubstantial bread.” And it wound up in the official Latin liturgy as *panis quotidianus* – daily bread. You see that, sadly, of all those choices, “daily” is somehow the *least* evocative, the least poetic, the least interesting – and, yet, we may just be able to live into this ambiguity a bit.

“The bread that we eat, is it not ... the body of Christ?” or so St. Paul asks – and we answer readily, “Yes. I believe.” Is it not our daily bread? Yes, of course. Is it not our common food? Yes. The bread of necessity? Yes. The bread of the future? Yes. Our supersubstantial bread? Yes, yes, yes! As the ad campaign asks, “What other food can sustain you for a week?” We eat only the tiniest crumb, and take only the smallest sip – and yet it is enough.

And is it not more than enough to sustain us, even in the midst of horrors that we dare not imagine?

Will it not nurture us, even when we think we are beyond all hope?

Can it not heal us, even when we suffer at the hands of the most horrific evils?

Will we not be transformed by it, even when we stubbornly insist that we no longer need this saving help? Yes, yes, yes!

The Rev'd J. Barrington Bates

Jonah 3:1-10

Luke 11:29-32

Psalms 51:11-18

*Create in me a
clean heart, O God,
and renew a right
spirit within me.*

Jonah was a severe and ridiculous person, but when he came with the word of the Lord on his lips, announcing in its streets that in forty days the city of Nineveh would be overthrown, the people of that dirty old city took him very seriously. As soon as they heard the bad news, they put on sackcloth and fasted, and repented of whatever their sins were. This irritated Jonah tremendously; he had wanted to watch them go down in flames.

But the Lord had mercy.

Jesus is in a bad temper himself when He brings Jonah into the Gospel. The crowds are pressing around him, looking, he says, for a sign. Looking for some kind of big news, or some absolute clarification, or the one answer to all their problems. Looking, at the very least, for something spectacular. Jesus says that all they will get is the sign of Jonah. Nothing spectacular, not even the drama of sackcloth and ashes.

What is the change of heart that Jesus speaks of, the change that is greater than the one sought by God through Jonah? What is this new repentance? How do I do it? I look at what is staring me in the face already. *You have a greater than Jonah, a greater than Solomon, here. Right here, already.*

We are all in Love. Living from that hope and faith is contrition.

Thursday of the First Week of Lent

Esther 14:1-6, 12-14 **Esther.**

Matthew 7:7-12 Perhaps you read about
P s a l m 138 the young Hebrew
woman Esther and her
foe, the Persian

(Iranian!) Prime Minister Haman; and/or read the Biblical book named for her in Sunday School or Hebrew School. Have you celebrated Purim with family and friends or at least heard about the holiday?

Are Esther and her adversary, Haman, relevant to our Lent 2003?

The Hebrews were in exile in Persia (Iran). They had adopted Persian names (Esther's Hebrew name was Hadasah). They had no doubt assimilated on the surface (dress and daily language, for example). Some worked in the Persian government. Prime Minister Haman demanded that they worship the Persian gods; accept Persian ethics; assimilate spiritually, intellectually, morally.

We too are in exile, pressured by various "Hamans" to worship idols; to live inhuman values.

We have elected some of our Hamans, given them legal power over us - and they have greedily grabbed more, appointed Hamans worse than themselves. These Hamans beat the drums for a war of revenge which will end in a Pyrrhic victory; for a creeping inerrant theocracy. They preach the security of an imperial presidency and a police nation; promote the ravishing of the Earth, our home.

Other Hamans are our own cravings for security, acceptance, keeping up with the Joneses, *la dolce vita*. These

Continued on page 10

urge us to accept the culture of executive and corporate greed and malfeasance; promote re-segregation and national isolationism; idolize youth, health and wealth.

Like Esther our challenge is to be loyal to our God, that is to our most ethical, loving selves so that we may *enter into life*. (Matthew 19:17) Like Esther we groan, *help me who am alone and have no helper but You* (Esther 14:3) so that we can to live the two great commandments (Matthew 22:36-40) cost what it may. And at this time it does and will cost dearly.

Our Mother-Father *knows what we need before (we) ask (Hér/)Him*. (Matthew 6:8) And this Lent 2003, about 18 months after September 11, we need all God's help we can get to live love of our God (and not another's); love of neighbor regardless of ethnicity, skin color, age, health, economic status; and love of self as we are moment-by-moment.

... on the day I called, You answered me, You increased my strength of soul.
(Psalm 138:3)

Marge O'Connell

Friday of the First Week of Lent

Ezekiel 18:21-28 **When Lenten**
Matthew 5:20-26 Meditation time comes
P s a l m 1 3 0 around, I always agree to
participate even though I

know I will agonize over every word I write. But that's the point, I volunteer precisely because the assignment challenges me; because it forces me to reflect carefully and prayerfully on the meaning of the lessons and the insight I glean from them. This and other volunteer activities I'm engaged in, such as the Shelter Program, call upon my time, patience, energy, understanding, etc. and I come away better for it. Even though I may enter into a task kicking and screaming, I know that once done, I will take away something positive; I will gain in some way. Whether my social awareness is increased or my spiritual growth enhanced, I mature as a human being and Christian; at least that is my hope.

God is always challenging us, raising the bar, upsetting our complacency, asking us to do more; to be more. The Gospel reading for today tells us that we will be judged, not only, for breaking the Law, but also, for harboring ill will or anger towards our friends, family, neighbors, colleagues, etc. Before we are truly worthy to approach God's Table, we are told we must first resolve our differences, ask for forgiveness; settle any disputes.

A very tall order, a seemingly impossible order given our human nature! But the Old Testament and Psalm readings give us hope that even though we are terribly flawed creatures, God applauds every successful effort we make at following His tenets. Indeed, God will forget all our past offenses if we "consider and turn away from all transgressions..." I like to think that even though we may try and fail many times to understand, forgive or feel generous toward our fellow human beings, God will be there to celebrate, indeed, embrace every one of our success stories no matter how small.

Candace Lombardi

Saturday of the First Week of Lent

Deuteronomy 26:16-19 *Be ye therefore perfect.*

Matthew 5:43-48 *Impossible!*

Psalms 119:1-8 *Even as your Father in heaven is perfect.*



*Oh that my wayes were Directed
to keepe thy Statutes. Ps. 119.5
W. Simpson Sculy*

From Francis Quarles: *Emblemes*, 1635
From *English Emblem Books*
by Rosemary Freeman, 1966 Octagon
Books, Inc., New York

Impossible! And the Greek text gives us no help: the term "teleios" also means "perfect," or "complete," even "absolute." It sounds hopeless!

The pilgrim soul, in this picture from a 17th century devotional book, is well aware of the problem. She unfeignedly desires to be righteous, but the labyrinthine pits threaten to swallow her.

A very wise priest used to tell me, "The bible doesn't teach us to be good. It teaches us to be holy." The sun rises on the evil and the good, and the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. If we try to be holy, or even if we don't, we shall not be forsaken.

Liz Hill

Listen and obey. All three

readings are centered on this essential teaching. Isaiah writes that the beasts of the earth know their master better than the Israelites who rebel against the Lord. In Matthew 23, God tells us to listen to the lawgivers (the Pharisees) but obey him.

The Pharisees do not practice what they preach, so we should not emulate them. Do not call them "Teacher", or "Father" or Leader - there is only One. He alone can cleanse you of your sins - obey God and live eternally. Psalm 50 cautions us to offer sincere thanks to God, and to do what we have promised to do; again we are admonished to listen to Him or suffer the consequences. How hard it is to really listen.

There are so many distractions of our own making. We perceive God's truth through carefully arranged filters which bring us closer to the "reality" we prefer, rather than what God has actually given us. Obedience is equally hard to accept and implement - we take what is simple and make it needlessly difficult, worrying about how we will appear to others, or to ourselves. It is our choice, then, to be children of God or children of the Pharisees.

Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20

Matthew 23:1-12

Psalm 50: 7-15, 22-24

Denise Kelly

Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent

A few years ago I was struck by the phrase "schools of charity," a graceful way of describing the role of the church for the individual. We may be made in God's image, but charity - true caring for one another, on Jesus' terms - does not come naturally.

Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. It is some comfort to me to realize that this is not expected to be easy. Why do we observe Lent every year if not to go back to our school of charity, putting our own needs aside for a season? Baptism may mark us profoundly, but it's just a start. I like to think of the spiritual life as a spiral, cycling around through the church year, atonement and redemption, but in some way making some progress each time. The spiral may go down rather than up for a space of years, but God willing, we find our bearings and continue that spiraling ascent into true charity.

To the Lord belong mercies and forgiveness, even though we rebelled against him.

God gives us exemplars of charity, not only Jesus but also the saints we know in the flesh, people whose climb on the spiral may not look high to them, but teaches us a thing or two. And yet it feels very hard to know just where we are going. Each of us has a unique destiny to discover through the cultivation of charity.

Approaching this Lent my prayer is very familiar. I cannot imagine another way to start. *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name; and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.*

Daniel 9:3 - 10

Luke 6:27 - 38

Psalms 79:1 - 9

Ted Wiprud

Monday of the Second Week of Lent

In Jeremiah, the story of the potter molding a spoiled piece of clay into a work of art is a beautiful metaphor; our own brokenness can be "remade" by God. Likewise, we read in the Psalm, "I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become a broken vessel." The psalm follows with God blessing and making whole something that was broken. The gospel reading illustrates the broken nature of Jesus' disciples. While Jesus talks about his passion and death, his disciples are only concerned about who will be at his right hand.

We can all identify with the behavior of the disciples. We know that ultimately, however, they mend their ways and turn toward God. That is what repentance is all about. Many times I am sure we all have felt like broken pieces of clay. I know how these feelings can keep us away from a closer connection with God. These readings, however, assure us that we are in good company. Even with all our faults, we know we can change if we let the Great Potter mold us. Lent is that special time when we can both change and be changed.

Jeremiah 18:1-11, 18-20

Matthew 20:17-28

Psalm 31:9-16

Jeffrey S. Truglia

Wednesday of the Second Week of Lent

The joy and wonder of the spiritual journey in our lives has little or nothing to do with material well being. Wealth, power, elements of beauty - if removed and separated from the soul, inevitably lead to aggression, arrogance and avarice. But if part of the fabric of a life that is rooted in an awareness that God is the ultimate guide for all that is good, the evil that flows through our human life is overcome and the love which is at the core of our being can be discovered. This is the true wealth, power and beauty of our existence.

To go beyond the self and into the realm of God is to be transported, whether by the sayings of prophets or the acts of others, in a manner that gives grace to our lives and meaning to our everyday thoughts and feelings. It is also much more fun than just thinking about

money and success.

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Luke 16:19-31

P s a l m 1

John Samuels

Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

Jealousy and envy are such potent emotions. Joseph's brothers are driven to near homicidal rage by jealousy for their father's special regard for their brother. Similarly, in Jesus' parable, the vineyard's tenants are driven to murder the vineyard owner's son out of envy for his inheritance. Both Joseph and the vineyard owner's son come to grief because of the jealousy and envy their privileges incite in those around them. But the perpetrators come to grief as well. Joseph's brothers will eventually be driven from their homes by severe famine. Jesus indicates that the vineyard owner's revenge upon the killers of his son will be severe.

Jesus' story describes his own fate in parable. Its juxtaposition with Joseph's story points to how similar Joseph's fate is to Christ's. Like Jesus, Joseph was rejected by his own. Like Jesus, Joseph's fate was eventually to reign. Though cast down, envied, punished and persecuted, God's plans for Jesus and Joseph were ultimately to raise them to heights that their persecutors could never have imagined.

Our jealousy can be hurtful to those whom we envy. But we do damage to ourselves when we become obsessed by these emotions. When these powerful emotions take us over, it's as if a tree takes root in us. The tree may grow, becoming tall and overshadowing. But its roots feed upon our very hearts.

Though being consumed by jealousy and envy is painful, being their object can be worse. It is so difficult when those around us focus their resentments on us. But as Christ reminds us, what is rejected by some can become highly valued by others.

In this season of Lent, we pray that God inspires in us a right focus on all that we have been given, rather than on what has been given to others. And we pray that when we feel rejected by others that we remember that our God loves us and values us — to the point of taking on our humanity — and suffering death to secure our salvation.

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-28

Matthew 21:33-43

Psalms 105:16-22

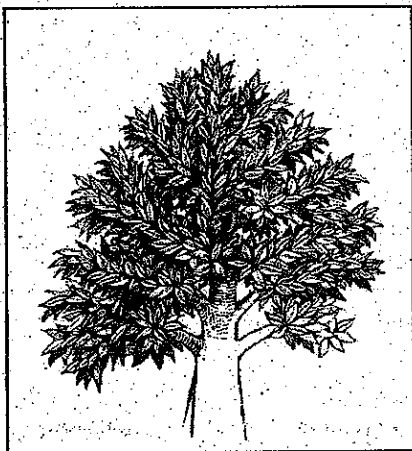
Mark Collins

Friday in the Second Week of Lent

The passages about which I was asked to reflect all touch upon the magnanimity of God — that benevolent, often sudden and surprising forgiveness — generously bestowed, unbeckoned and seemingly undeserved.

Personally, and perhaps I am lucky in my acquaintances, I have found that this quality is not exclusive to God. At times, sadly too numerous to mention, when I have said or done an injurious things — perhaps not intentionally but certainly thoughtlessly — over and again I find in friends, relatives, co-workers the capacity to forgive without rancor or resentment. It is in these moments

that I feel God's response to Micah's challenge to "show us marvelous things." In a world that can contain terrorism, racism and homophobia, I take comfort in knowing that forgiveness, tolerance and generosity of spirit also exist and thrive. During this season of reflection, I hope to look for these qualities in the life around me and, finding them in abundance, exclaiming (to quote a writer not assigned to me), "O wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in it."



Botanical Tree

Savannah, 1979

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20
L u k e 15 : 11 - 21
Psalm 103:1-4, (5-8), 9-12

Vin Knight

Saturday of the Second Week of Lent

I love a good soap opera. Na'aman was a big wig in the Syrian army. He would have been a media superstar except for one thing - that pesky leprosy. During one particular pillage of Israel, Na'aman picked up a "little maid" for his wife. Even the maid was impressed with her new master. "Your husband is da bomb" the little maid told her mistress, "Too bad about that leprosy thing. You know, there's a guy back home that could help him out."

Mrs. Na'aman told her husband the good news. He told the King of Syria about the possible cure and the King sent Na'aman off

Monday of the Third Week of Lent

2 Kings 5:1-15b

Luke 4:23-30

Psalms 42:1-7

with lots of money to pay for the treatments. Apparently forgetting to obtain an address from the little maid, Na'aman went straight to the

King of Israel. That king really freaked when he learned the reason for Na'aman's visit. "I'm can't cure leprosy. You're just trying to make me look bad," he whined as he tore his clothes for dramatic affect.

In one of those inexplicable coincidences usually reserved for DAYS OF OUR LIVES, Elisha, the real healer, heard of the clothes ripping incident and told the King of Israel that he'd help the Syrian visitor. So Na'aman and his entourage hiked to Elisha's place. There the prophet told him to jump in the river seven times and he'd be healed. After

(continued on page 15)

traveling all that way with hopes of a miracle cure, Na'aman was furious that Elisha prescribed such nonsense. But one of his posse thought Na'aman should at least give it a try. He did. Voila! The leprosy was gone.

In a twist worthy of AS THE WORLD TURNS, Jesus recounted the story years later. He reminded a bunch of scholars that even though Elisha had the power to cure leprosy, Na'aman, a commander of the enemy's army, was the only one that came to him for help. Now what on earth is that about? Surely he wasn't the only one seeking help with his disease. Certainly the little maid wasn't the only one who knew of Elisha's wisdom. I'd imagine she had even gossiped about it at the Jordan River Laundromat. So what's up?

It's that "can't see the forest for the trees" thing. God is right in front of us every day of our lives. As today's psalm states, our souls thirst for God.

Open your eyes. Open your mind. Open your heart. The possibilities for our lives are endless. You just have to know where to look and accept the answer when it arrives ...and tune in tomorrow.

David Martin

Keeping score is something we humans

love to do. We focus on who has the winning sports teams—what is their record, what are the players' statistics? The temptation to quantify things affects our personal and professional lives. What kind of salary does someone make? How many square feet in the apartment? Who has the highest GPA? Who has received more honors or awards?

But God's ways are not our ways, as the lesson from Matthew's Gospel shows us. Peter asks the question for all of us—"How many times do I have to forgive another person who has sinned against me?" He, like us, is seeking to quantify forgiveness. "Just give me a rule to

follow, Lord."

But Jesus says we are to forgive not seven times, but seventy times

Tuesday of the Third Week of Lent

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

Matthew 18:21-35

Psalms 25:3-10

seven. "OK Lord, so I'll have to get a bigger scorecard, but now I understand the rule. I must forgive exactly 490 times, and that's it?" The parable that follows shows us that this is not the point.

The servant whose debt was forgiven owed a mind-boggling sum, as a talent was more than 15 years' wages of a laborer. Yet it was all forgiven. Instead of returning this forgiveness, the servant insists on enforcing a much smaller debt owed to him. After all, he is human, and his instinct is to keep score and balance his accounts.

Thanks be to God that God does not keep score, if we learn to forgive as we have been forgiven. What a precious gift to comfort us during this penitential season.

John Grimes

Obedience is at the heart of today's readings. Obedience—that is, obeying orders—has always been a challenge for me. I am not good at doing what others order me to do.

The Lenten tradition of obedience is to perform acts of penitence and abstinence. But Lent is also a time of renewing our faith.

We can show our love of God by making quiet time to be with him. My act of obedience is to sit still and be quiet each day. Sit and breathe deeply, breathing in the love of God, breathing out anxiety and distraction. Breathing in Christ's mercy, breathing out all dis-ease.

After a
few min-
utes of
s u c h
breathing,
my mind
will quiet.
I focus on

Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9

Matthew 5:17-19

P s a l m 78:1-6

one word to silence inner chatter. Jesus, perhaps. Or mercy.

Now submissive and quiet, I ask nothing. I empty myself. I listen for a still, soft voice. When the quiet time ends, I make no judgments about it, whether it was good or bad, successful or not.

Sometimes shadows lift within me. I might hear a word, or feel the Creator's presence. Things may feel oddly new.

God speaks in silence. Obeying is making some silence so that one can hear, "Be still and know that I am God."

Elaine Kellams

Obedience and Freedom.

What is obedience? Why do we cooperate in everyday life? We agree to cooperate to make things go better or maybe we don't even think about whether or not things will go better. Cooperation keeps things going on track. We stop at traffic lights; alternately yield where two lanes are converging into the tunnel. This is the best way to keep traffic flowing and maintain continuity and order.

Law and Order...

Obedience and Freedom...

Thursday of the Third Week in Lent

Jeremiah 7:23-28

Luke 11:14-23

Psalms 95:6-11

Why do we obey God's Law? Why do we "put on Christ?" Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that obedience comes from faith and at the same time faith comes from obedience with no chronological difference in the two. The wonder-

ful mystery is that freedom and joy also occur simultaneously as free gifts.

Obedying traffic laws and displaying traffic good manners gives us a sense of freedom or comfort to know that others are also cooperating and may not run into us on the road.

But the gift of freedom which is given to us through obedience/faith is truly joy which passes all understanding.

The first Sunday after the Epiphany we sang a hymn: *Lord, your cross on us be signed, that, like the wise in God's service, we may perfect freedom find.*

Van Rodgers

FOR me, this is deja vu all over again. These are the same passages I was asked to consider last year. And what a difference a year makes.

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

Does this or does this not address us here today, as we face up to greed and scandal in business, racism and selfishness in politics and bellicosity among those who we choose to lead us.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, says the psalmist. But my people did not listen to my voice....so I gave

them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own counsels.

Yet if we do mend our ways, I will be like the dew to Israel, God says. They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish like a garden.

Piece of cake, that.

How do we return when we have gone astray?

Friday of the Third Week in Lent

Hosea 14:1-9

Mark 12:28-34

Psalms 81:8-14

Continued on page 20

There's a clue here, in the passage from Mark: *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

And how to do this? The psalmist says, love God and walk in his ways. And what are those ways?

Hear Hosea: *Those who are wise understand these things; those who are discerning know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them.*

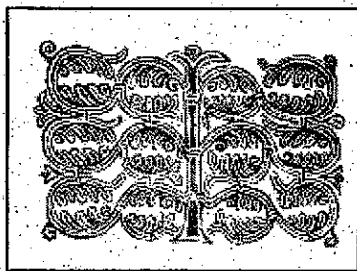
We try to kid ourselves that we don't know what this means. And surely there are complexities, there are tough decisions. There are balancing acts. But we need to face it...sometimes it's pretty simple. We may not like it, but we really know how we should act. Doing the right thing may be hard, but knowing what it is, most of the time, isn't that tough.

Question is, do we love God enough to do it? Or are we negotiating with him? Are we following the devices and desires of our own hearts?

How stubborn are we?

Isabel Spencer

The message of today's three readings seems clear. In Hosea, we read, "Let us return to the Lord...He will heal us...He will bind us up." In Psalm 51, we find, "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart...". In Luke, the tax collector bemoaning his sinfulness is justified and thereby exalted. The overtly religious Pharisee is not.



Tree of Life

Savannah

What God seems to want of us is honest introspection. Genuine honesty in this regard, however, requires a recognition of our own imperfections, our own sinfulness. Depending on where

Saturday of the Third Week in Lent

H o s e a 6 : 1 - 6

L u k e 18 : 9 - 14

P s a l m 51 : 15 - 20

we are in life's journey, our reactions to this message might be quite different. For those facing a spiritual crisis, today's message should be comforting – imperfections, if faced head on, can be "forgiven", the burden lifted. For those not suffering similar trials, imperfections, sinfulness, might not be so self-evident. For this latter group, today's message may be disturbing. It is an uncomfortable reminder that "good people" face the same spiritual risks as the Pharisees of the Gospel. No son or daughter of Adam escapes the on-going call to repentance. In the end, we all need Lent.

Vincent J. Truglia

The

period of Lent is usually associated with self-examination, fasting, self-denial and an awareness of our mortality. Therefore,

it was most refreshing to read scriptures dealing with happiness, healing, faith and thankfulness.

Isaiah's message deals with God's promise to the people of Israel that he will create "new heavens and a new earth" and restore Jerusalem. Peace will reign and the inhabitants will dwell in happiness and security.

In John we are told about an official of Capernaum who begs Jesus to cure his son who is on the verge of death. Jesus says, "Go; your son will live." The man doesn't return home until the following day because his faith in Jesus' word is sufficient. He knows his son has been healed.

Psalms 30 reveals the psalmist's thankfulness to God for healing his illness. He praises God for rescuing him from death and restoring him to a life of happiness.

After reading these three scripture selections I am more than ever aware of God's goodness and blessings and know that he will surely watch over us now and always. I believe these readings can be of help especially when we experience feelings of despair or lack of faith.

Lillie Burkhardt

Monday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Isaiah 65:17-25

John 4:43-54

Psalms 30:1-6, 11-13

In all three of these passages, I see comparisons made, in one way or another, between the ubiquitousness, power and pervasiveness of water and of God.

Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

John 5:1-18

Psalms 46:1-8

We know that God's power fills the universe, and we want to tap into that power. Or do we?

More often than not, when we say "Thy will be done," what we really mean is "Thy will be done my way"! Why is this so? Because God's power, like water, can sometimes have a wild, untamed quality to it and can break into our lives in unexpected ways and in unexpected places.

Jesus asks the paralyzed beggar, *Do you want to get well?* (John 5:6) Notice that the man does not request Jesus' help; he doesn't say, "Lord, heal me!" It is Jesus who approaches the man. One of the commentaries on this verse states that a beggar of that day could stand to lose a profitable (and easy) income if he were cured. *Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.* (John 5:8) The man is healed; apparently he has no choice! *See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.* (John 5:14) Not only does the man receive an unsolicited healing, but he receives an unsolicited lecture as well!

Was the man grateful? The Bible doesn't really say. *God is . . . an ever-present help in trouble.* (Psalm 46:1) Ever present, like water, but when you pray, be prepared for surprises. God will always do what is best, but His plans may be different from yours!

John Senig

Truly, **Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Lent**
*truly I say to you, he who hears my word and be-
 lies him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*
Isaiah 49:8-15
John 5:19-29
Psalms 145:8-19

- John 5:24

To accept Jesus is to accept eternal life and to reject Him is death.

We must hear Jesus' words and believe in the Father.

In doing this we enter into a new relationship quite apart from anything the world around us knows. We enter into a new relationship of God's love where fear of death is banished and our death becomes a commencement to eternal reward.

To follow Jesus' example and accept His way of life is the ultimate way to peace and happiness. However, to reject Him is the path to death and judgment.

Philip Ragland

In one of the readings for today, Exodus 32:7-14, we witness a curious transition in the narrative. While Moses is receiving the

Thursday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Exodus 32:7-14

John 5:30-47

Psalm 106:6-7, 19-23

famous tablets containing the Ten Commandments, the Israelites are busying themselves with another of the great Biblical images – the Golden Calf. God warns Moses that “...thy people...have corrupted themselves” and says “now therefore let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them and that I may consume them.” Moses, cooler, more levelheaded, persuades God against it. What would the Egyptians think? Moses reasons. That He, the God of the Hebrews, for the sake of mischief, had saved them only to destroy them later?

The Lord, taking his point, repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

Here, in this strange passage, we see a puzzling switch in roles – for it is Moses, the creature, who is calling God, the Creator, back to His higher self. Throughout the Old Testament, we witness again and again this perplexing dichotomy in the nature of God – wherein God appears, in His god-like wrath and revenge, not god-like at all – but rather more like one of the worst of His own creatures. But as the great scribes of the Bible progress in their writings, the image of God deepens and matures – God becomes more fully human and more fully divine – until He is totally integrated into the manifestation of Jesus Christ – the Word made Flesh.

Matthew Snow

As the closing encore of the Voices of Ascension concert this past Christmas, soprano Marvis Martin sang an ethereal rendition of "This Little Light of Mine." It shook me to the core with its simple utterance and inner radiance - it's childlike affirmation of what truly lies at the core of the Christian life; to allow God's light to shine within and through us.

Friday of the Fourth Week in Lent

Wisdom 2:1a, 12-24

John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Psalm 34:15-22

What is the Christian life we strive to realize? In the context of a multi-cultural society, it is often a lonely and ill-defined journey. How do we keep our relationship with God alive and find a way for God's revelations to inform our interactions with the world? A friend observed that my strong emotional response to the song was partly due to being open to the beauty and truth of both the delivery and the message. As I know through my own experience, it is all too easy to keep a discreet distance from anything that may shake things up in the balance of my everyday life.

In today's Psalm, the believer is promised support and solace. *The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.* The corollary to this reassuring promise is that the Christian life is not without risk, struggle or isolation. In John's Gospel, Jesus experiences physical danger as a result of his Messianic assertions to the world. We probably will never face a similar situation as a result of outward manifestations of our faith. However, I believe there is real danger within us.

(continued on page 32)

(continued from page 31)

From the Book of Wisdom, we hear the observations of the *righteous man*, from the vantage point of the *unrighteous* world. *The very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange. We are considered by him as something base, and he avoids our ways as unclean.*

In the urban landscape of our well-appointed lives, I would suggest we contend with an internal dialogue that contains the essential question of these words from Wisdom; which side of the "righteous" divide are we on? The answer is sometimes very troubling, and all the more reason to continually look to God for guidance and reassurance.

In this season of contemplation, may we hear the Good Shepard's voice, no matter where it seems to lead us, and resist the temptation to edit our Christ-like selves from the world's probing gaze. May we truly seek the Holy Spirit's power to enrich our relationship with God, no matter how "otherworldly" we become as a result, and in so doing, reveal God's grace and love to all who are open to its influence.

David Cholcher

Hmm. How to grasp this mystery!

Here, in Jeremiah, and in the Psalm, we hear God reportedly as intemperate as the Pharisee hot-heads in John! (Psalm 7:11 – *God has indignation every day*; Jeremiah 11:21 – *Behold, I will punish them; the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine; and none of them shall be left.*)

Could there really be an identity crisis in God's nature, as some theologians have speculated, between the OT and the NT?

Or, did the Psalmist and Jeremiah somehow fail to get God's "message" being bound by some sort of Laws as constricting as those of the Pharisees? Laws which Christ urged us to respect but to go way beyond, by absorbing Him so fully that from our hearts *shall flow rivers of living water.*

Spirit-water that flows freely over reefs of convention and prejudice; and can carry us over dams of hatred, war and fear - and all the other snags of dam-nation!

Christ makes it sound so simple: just *come to me and drink*; but we haven't got it down yet!

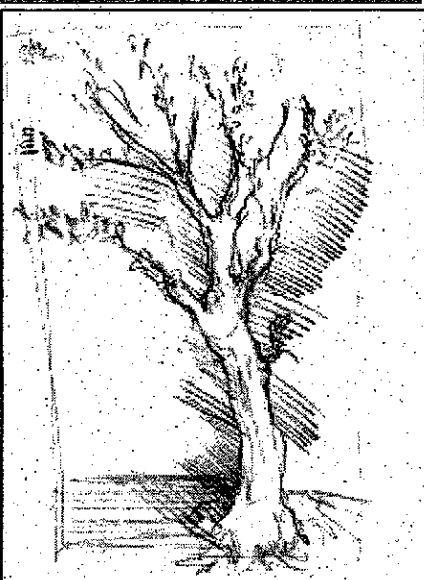
Gretchen Dumler

Saturday of the Fourth Week of Lent

Jeremiah 11:18-20

John 7:37-52

Psalm 7:6-11



Tree

Matthew Snow, 2003

The *Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.*

I find it interesting that such a seemingly simple phrase can actually be so difficult to accept. The journey of life is often strange and confusing. Too often we find ourselves asking question such as "Where am I going?" or "What am I doing?" In the last year of my life I have asked myself these questions many times.

It seems to be human nature to try to control destiny. Usually the word "want" takes a center-stage position in that endeavor. You might think, "I want" this or that, be it the right job or house or car or person to share life with. All of this is in an effort to guide yourself down the path you think you should be on. When often you find that you are not moving in the direction you were hoping for, confusion, angst and sometimes depression set in making it seem impossible to move in any direction at all. How do you overcome this?

Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Susanna 1-9, 15-29, 33, 34-62 or verses 41-62
John 8:1-11 or 8:12-20 **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

It is by allowing yourself to be one of the sheep of his pasture! The Father, through his unending love has set out a path for everyone. I have come to realize only very recently that I am traveling on the journey he has set me on. I may not always understand or even like it at times but it is my destiny. I am confronting the challenges of my life and taking comfort that the Lord is with me always.

He revives my soul and guides me along the right pathways for his Name's sake.

As I have come to this realization, I have found a sense of peace that I have never known. Learning to revel in where I am instead of agonizing over where I am not has become my joy. The beauty in this is that I have realized that truly my cup is running over and my life is blessed.

Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Christopher Montella

I am so like the people in the wilderness, constantly impatient, constantly ready to disbelieve, no matter how many miracles I may have seen and I have seen a few in my lifetime.

God, however, is more patient with me than I am with myself. He willingly shows me again and again that He

Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Numbers 21:4-9

John 8:21-30

Psalm 102:15-22

is there. All I have to do is have faith and believe. All I have to do is move forward doing the next right thing, and He is there supporting me.

All I have to do! Sometimes it seems too much for me!

Barbara Head

Canticle 13 begins: *Glory to you, Lord God of our Fathers.* Just who are our fathers anyway? Abraham is one. Abraham, our patriarch of faith and obedience, chose again and again to trust God, and it is Abraham's example that sheds light on today's readings.

In the Old Testament story, the connection to Abraham may not be explicit, but it is clear that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do *what Abraham did*. Rather than use words to defend themselves, they take bold, faith-filled action, even staking their lives on God's faithfulness. It would have been easy for them to SPEAK of the lineage of Abraham, and then BOW to the idols Nebuchadnezzar had created, but instead,

Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Daniel 3:14-20, 24-28

John 8:31-42

Canticle 2 or 13

bound hand and foot, they faced the flames, and emerged unscathed. In the process they led the Babylonian king to worship God.

In John 8:39 the Jews in the story begin to debate with Jesus as they summon Abraham to their verbal defense: *They answered him 'Abraham is our father.'* Jesus said to them, *"If you were Abraham's children, then you would be doing what Abraham did."*

Jesus calls for action that proclaims faith rather than just empty words. Do your actions match what you say you believe?

Andrew Ranson

William Law wrote in 1728 in A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, *If we are to follow Christ, it must be in our common way of spending every day. If we are to live unto God at any time or in any place, we are to live unto him in all times and in all places. If we are to use anything as the gift of God, we are to use everything as his gift.* Today is the feast of William Law. This and other of Law's writings, along with the devout example of his life, influenced the lives of many famous theologians, including John Wesley, and helped to lay the foundation for the religious revival of the eighteenth century,

Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent

G e n e s i s 1 7 : 1 - 8

J o h n 8 : 5 1 - 5 9

P s a l m 1 0 5 : 4 - 1 1

the Evangelical Movement in England, and the Great Awakening in America. Our beloved Church of the Ascension was founded by people who were deeply affected by the challenge to take Christian living very seriously. When I speak of our rich heritage I am often most often mindful of the glorious and important works of art that grace the interior of our worship space. In remembering the life of passionate love for Christ lived by this otherwise quiet schoolmaster from Putney, England, I find myself drawn to awareness of the other rich elements of our heritage. These spiritual elements have inspired and continue to resonate in the lives of the people of this parish all through its one hundred and seventy five years.

Richard Thomas

Blasphe^my or "Son of God?" Charlie Hill, our fellow parishioner, once shared the following quote with me: "Your orthodoxy is heresy; mine is doxy."

In John's gospel Jesus escapes being stoned for blasphemy - or was it for the good deeds he was doing? How relevant to our times when many are still being stoned, or murdered by other means, or have their lives threatened for views or behavior seen by others as blasphemous. Often what one person or group views as virtues others view as hostile or heresy. What contributed to the murderous rage resulting in 9/11 - our sins or our virtues? Recently, while reading a biography of St. Francis of Assisi, I often wondered how he escaped with his life for following in Christ's footsteps.

Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent

J e r e m i a h 2 0 : 7 - 1 3

J o h n 1 0 : 3 1 - 4 2

P s a l m 1 8 : 1 - 7

And what about my own struggle with faith and belief? I was not brought up to believe in Jesus as the "Son of God." But on Good Friday I cannot bring myself to join the crowd that shouts *Crucify Him* and I cannot stop myself from reciting the Nicene Creed. Can I accept my faith and belief as a mystery that I may never comprehend and a struggle that may never be resolved? Like Jeremiah, I struggle, but I am always drawn back and what I am drawn back to I know without doubt is good.

Stanley J. Weinberg

Ezekiel's prophecy was written in Babylon, probably about 593 BC! Nebuchadnezzar had deported the Israelites to Babylon. Ezekiel was grasping at hope for himself and his fellow exiles by recalling God's promise.

On the Day of God - the "Yom Yahweh" - we will be gathered together under *David*, our shepherd in the *land that God gave to Her/His servant Jacob*. We shall never again defile ourselves with our idols. We will be careful to observe God's statutes. Our Mother/Father will make an everlasting covenant of peace with us and will pitch Her/His tent among us forever.

Here we are in 2003 AD, more than 2500 years after Ezekiel's prophecy. We stand at the abyss: war and rumors of war; unemployment and underemployment; deflation; inflation. Columbia. Increasingly

Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Ezekiel 37:21-28

John 11:45-53

Psalms 85:1-7



Tree

Savannah

unaffordable housing and medical care. Aging. Venality in corporations, religious, political and medical institutions and the military - industrial - federal government "octopus." Bias. Rudeness. Rejection. Overcrowding. Incessant Noise.

While we savor Ezekiel's hope-crammed words, we need to work on our problems and prevent war. But since no problem, no one and no institution is immune to prayer ... *Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us*. Deliver us from our vicious, revenge-filled, stupid hubris. Don't throw up your hands in sadness and anger as we savage each other and your Earth. Save us from ourselves. Restore us to your shalom.

The setting is a dinner six days before Pass-over. The religious community is getting ready to celebrate God's saving lives of the Jews. Jesus is getting attention because he recently brought Lazarus back to life. In two ways, therefore, this passage points us to events where God's miracles saved or restored life.

Mary, however, appears and her actions foreshadow death. Instead of doing as Judas suggests and selling ointment to raise money for the poor, she anoints Jesus who tells us *she hath done what she could, she is come afore hand to anoint my body to the burying.*

Mary has responded physically and ceremonially to the reality of the approaching suffering and death of Jesus. There are elements of foresight, acceptance, participation, comforting, and honoring in her role. She is not fearing, bemoaning, rejecting, fleeing. Her actions foreshadow, acknowledge, and prepare. They tell us that it is time to recognize the coming death of Jesus, to prepare for it, to participate in its meaning, to meditate on it, and to honor it in our hearts.

Let us anoint the reality of suffering, of dying, of saying *Thy will be done.* And meditate on how Jesus' death was transformed into the promise to us of life everlasting.

Monday of the Sixth Week in Lent

I s a i a h 4 2 : 1 - 9
H e b r e w s 1 1 : 3 9 - 1 2 : 3
J o h n 1 2 : 1 - 1 1
o r M a r k 1 4 : 3 - 9

Connie Heginbotham

FOR *they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

Tuesday of Holy Week

A constant challenge I have as a Christian is channeling my energies toward my relationship with Christ versus concerning myself with how I am thought of by others. Additionally our tendency as human beings to use the lives of others as the yardstick against which to measure our worth is an ultimately unsatisfying one.

Each of us Christians and human beings contribute most to the world when we stretch ourselves by taking risks and enduring the associated failures. When we take the time, (whether meditating in church or on the commute to work) our souls communicate to us and we call these messages daydreams. I believe this voice is God in us - coaching us, encouraging us, directing us. He whispers to remind us to follow our instincts and embrace our true nature.

(continued on page 42)

Tuesday of the Sixth Week of Lent

I s a i a h 49:1 - 6

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

John 12:37-38, 42-50

J o h n 12: 42 - 50

(continued from page 41)

Yet this voice when not heeded can be a major source of frustration. Deep in our core we know we have not pushed ourselves to pursue our dreams and live up to a life led consistent with Christ's teachings. As a substitute we look for validation outwardly. We tell ourselves, "If this individual or group praises me and accepts me, I must be good." Once aligned safely with this club, all others can become a threat, especially those we see taking the risks we don't.

Our preoccupation with others, especially the difference in others, is the root of so much strife and divisiveness in the world. Lent is an ideal time to self-examine and strip away our layers of distractions. Some questions I've been asking myself: "What do I stand for? In my daily interactions how do I discipline myself to behave as a Christian? What are my unique gifts? What steps am I taking to perfect and share them? How can I help others to do the same?"

Clarke Griffith

Lord, *is it I?* So query the apostles in Matthew 26:14-25, in response to Christ's prophecy at the Last Supper that one among them will betray him. With that harrowing statement, the attentive reader is once again caught up, heartbeat to anxious heartbeat, with his Biblical counterparts - the apostles, whose highly imperfect natures match ours' exactly.

Those four words - *Lord, is it I?* - can still grip our hearts, increase our pulse rate and cause us to make a detailed review of our lives, while, simultaneously time and space dissolve and we are placed squarely at the feet of the Master during one of the great episodes in New Testament history.

When Jesus hands Judas the sop to indicate that he will be the one (which Judas himself already knows), Judas rushes out into the night to fulfill his destiny as the Great Betrayer. What were his motives? What impulses were at

(continued on page 44)

Wednesday of the Sixth Week of Lent

I s a i a h 50:4 - 9 a
H e b r e w s 9:11-15, 24-28
J o h n 13:21 - 35
o r M a t t h e w 26:1-5, 14-25
P s a l m 69:7-15, 22-23

(continued from page 43)

work inside his breast to cause him to seek out Jesus' enemies and, for the mean sum of thirty pieces of silver, finally set into motion the great defining drama of our spiritual lives? This exact intelligence has been withheld from us, but the instrument of his betrayal - a kiss - has left its mark down through the centuries.

A kiss.

Why betray Him with a kiss? Why did Judas not simply lead the soldiers to Him and, pointing, say "There He is. That's the one" or "That's the man you want. Seize Him!"? But instead of a few simple words, he uses one simple act and, delivering it to maximum effect, hits his target head on. The ramifications of that kiss are many and complex - too many and too complex to be gone into at this time - but in that moment the parameters of the known world blurred, shifted and were redefined forever.

The reader is later told that Judas, unable to bear the consequences of his act, hangs himself in shame and despair. Soon, we know, Jesus too will die, but contained within His death is the source of His greatest triumph and His greatest gift.

Matthew Snow

One of the most enjoyable traits of growing older is the ability to reacquaint ourselves with scriptures or artwork, and of course music that we've seen several times before, but because we have grown wiser it effects us differently. In today's scriptures I was struck with a couple of new thoughts.

Imagine you are at a dinner party and everyone has taken their places at the table. In the middle of the dinner someone stops eating and gets a bucket of water and washes everyone's feet. They could have done this as the guest arrived but he interrupted his eating to show this humility. One of my most profound lessons in adult life has been to try to except a gift when it is being given to you. Isn't it amazing that in Luke 22: 24 that Jesus' disciples decided to bicker instead of really enjoy the gift they are being given? In the Exodus and Psalm readings for today they also are arguing, doubting, and complaining. Is there some sort of

(continued on page 46)

Thursday of the Sixth Week of Lent

Exodus 12 - 14 a
1 Corinthians 11:23-26, 27-32
John 13: 1 - 15
or Luke 22: 14-30
Psalm 78:14-20, 23-25

(continued from page 45)

inherent human condition that as we are being given something we change the subject out of some sort of embarrassment? The person giving the gift never receives the honor due if we don't except what they are giving. Now let's get back to our dinner party. Our feet have been washed and 1 Corinthians 11:25 suggests that after supper the cup is raised, so we are toasting after we've eaten and our lesson on humility. Everything seems to lead to this moment. Jesus said, *This is the new covenant* so from this moment on Jesus' blood will be enough for all who believe in him. Have there ever been more profound words, yet Jesus' closest friends seem to miss the point and argue about who will betray him. Is The New Covenant a gift that we are able to accept and give honor to the giver?

This Maundy Thursday is a chance to go to Jesus' supper. With all my wisdom I intend to try to be there with him. I may be older and wiser than the first time I read these scriptures but I will always wonder if Jesus really had any idea how painful the next few hours were going to be?

Judy Cope

And it is by God's will that that we have
been sanctified through the offering of the body
of Jesus Christ once for all - Hebrews 10:10

Good Friday

Imagine for a moment that you had been there on that dreadful Friday when Jesus Christ was crucified. How would you have responded? Would you have been angry; dismayed at God for allowing this to happen? It would be an understandable reaction. While he was on the cross Jesus himself cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Why did Jesus allow himself to be sacrificed for us? Because ...it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain...Out of his anguish, he shall see light...The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. From this terrible act of violence came something extraordinary.

Through Christ's sacrifice, we are forgiven for all our transgressions. It was God's will that this should happen. God's will may seem unfair, even cruel, to us. But as Jesus offered himself on the cross, so must we learn to accept God's will. Psalm 40 reminds us, *Happy are those who make the Lord their trust...* Let us make the Lord our trust. For it is through God's will that we have been saved.

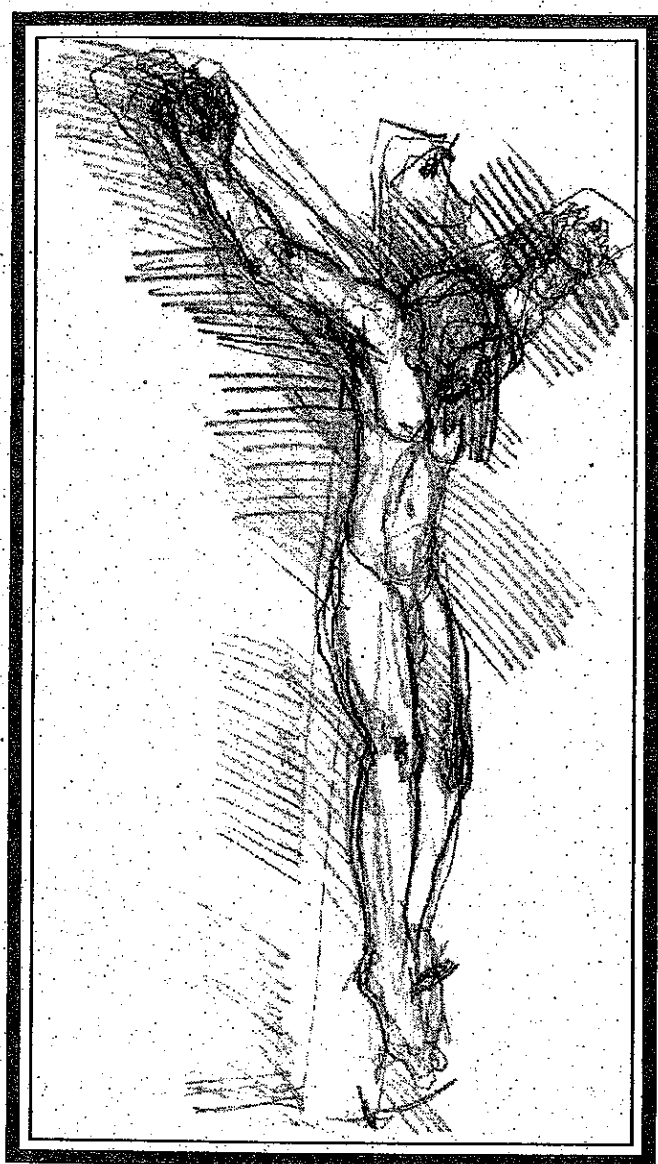
Friday of the Sixth Week of Lent

I s a i a h 52:13 - 53:12

H e b r e w s 10:1 - 25

P s a l m 40:1 - 14

Elizabeth Khan



Crucifixion, pencil study

Matthew Snow, 2003

O

God,

There is no celebration of the Eucharist on this day.

When there is a Liturgy of the word, the Celebrant begins with the Collect of the Day:

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

After the Gospel (and homily), in place of the Prayers of the People, the Anthem "In the midst of life" is sung or said:

In the midst of life we are in death;
from whom can we seek help?
From you alone, O Lord,
who by our sins are justly angered.

*Holy God, Holy and Mighty,
Holy and merciful Savior,
deliver us not into the bitterness of eternal death.*

Lord, you know the secrets of our hearts;
shut not your ears to our prayers,
but spare us, O Lord.

*Holy God, Holy and Mighty,
Holy and merciful Savior,
deliver us not into the bitterness of eternal death.*

O worthy and eternal Judge,
do not let the pains of death
turn us away from you at our last hour.

*Holy God, Holy and Mighty,
Holy and merciful Savior,
deliver us not into the bitterness of eternal death.*

The service then concludes with the Lord's Prayer and the Grace.

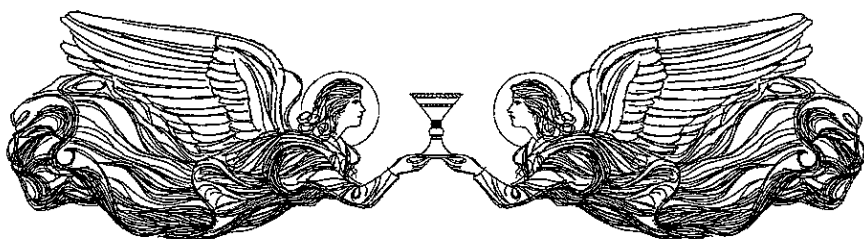
Saturday of the Sixth Week of Lent

J o b 1 4 : 1 - 1 4

P s a l m 1 3 0, o r 3 1 : 1 - 5

1 P e t e r 4 : 1 - 8

Matthew 27:57-66, o r John 19:38-42



Calendar

First Week	February 22
Second Week	March 1
Third Week	March 8
Fourth Week	March 15
Fifth Week	March 22
Palm Sunday	March 29
Easter Sunday	April 5

Contributions

The clergy and the Spiritual Formation Committee wish to thank all of the writers who contributed to the daily reflections in the 2003 Lenten Booklet. Their names are included with their reflections. Liz Hill submitted the unique 17th century cartoon illustrating her reflection. We also thank artists Savannah and Matthew Snow for their outstanding contributions of original art for this unique presentation.

Credits

Editor
Marge
O'Connell

Facilitator
Richard
Thomas

Illustrations
Cover Art
Savannah

Design/Layout
Matthew
Snow

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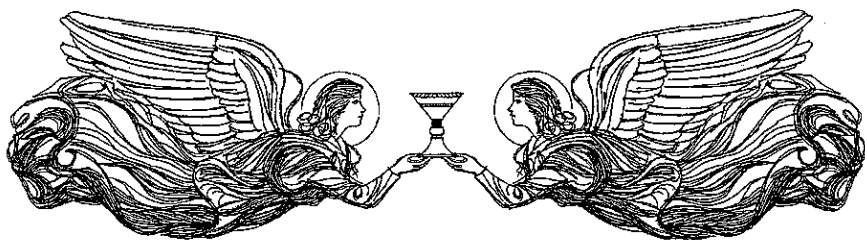
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The Church of the Ascension
in the City of New York
Fifth Avenue at Tenth Street

Parish House (offices and mailing address):

12 West 11th Street, New York, New York 10011

Telephone: (212) 254-8620, Facsimile: (212) 254-6520

Internet Address: www.ascensionnyc.org

Office Hours:

Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Regular Weekly Worship Schedule

Sundays:

The Holy Eucharist (Side altar) 9 a.m.

Holy Eucharist with Music (Church) 11 a.m.

Service of Meditations and Sacrament (Church) 7 p.m.

Weekdays:

Monday through Thursday - Holy Eucharist - Side Altar, 6 p.m.

Fridays - Holy Eucharist with Healing - Side Altar, 6 p.m.

Clergy & Staff

The Rev. Elizabeth G. Maxwell, *Rector*

The Rev. Edwin Chinery, *Assisting Priest*

Dennis Keene, D.M.A., *Organist & Choirmaster*

Andrew P. Jones, *Parish Administrator*

Vince Amodei, *Parish Bookkeeper*

Lenford Bowman, *Sexton*

Ravi Gayadin, *Assistant Sexton*

Dawa Sherpa, *Assistant Sexton*

Jennifer Passard, *Nursery Care*

Vestry

David Cholcher, *Warden*

Steven Hubbard, *Warden*

Lillie Burkhardt, *Treasurer*

Candace Lombardi, *Clerk*

Derek Baker

Peter Clark

Dorothy Dinsmoor

Lisa Dunn

Mary Gaillard

Sirkka Kyle

Tom Rice

Charles Schmidt

Maurice Seaton

Isabel Spencer

Stacy Spikes

Meredith Ward

The early 17th century Anglican priest and metaphysical poet, George Herbert, wrote: "Welcome deare feast of Lent." "Welcome deare feast"?! Not a time of meager rations and long prayers; heavy guilt and sour faces but a feast? Herbert continues,

"It's true, we cannot reach Christ's fortieth day;
Yet to go part of that religious way,
Is better than to rest:
We cannot reach our Savior's purity;
but are bid, *Be holy ev'n as he*.
In both let's do our best.

.....
Perhaps my God, though he be far before,
May turn, and take me by the hand, and...
Lord instruct us to improve our fast
By starving sin...

"The Temple" (1633)

As Lent begins and you read the thoughts of your fellow Ascensionites as well as the day's Lectionary readings, may you do what you can to starve sin. And when you stretch out your hands to grasp Jesus' may His bejeweled carpenters hands grasp yours.

Happy Lent! Blessed Spring!

Marge (Margaret) O'Connell
Editor