

40 DAYS



LENT

*February 17 - April 3
2021*



ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL
EPISCOPAL

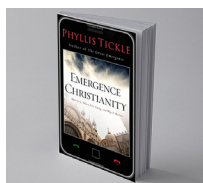
Love Christ • Serve Others • Welcome All

FORMATION OFFERINGS

Lent Forum – Challenging Conversations

Sundays, Feb. 21 - Mar. 21, 9 a.m.

Each Sunday on Zoom, Gertrud Mueller Nelson will walk us through becoming Easter People.



Book Study: Emergence Christianity

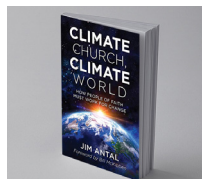
Wednesdays, Feb. 24 - Mar. 24, 7 - 8:30 p.m.

Join Rev. Dr. Carol Worthing for a five part study via Zoom on Emergence Christianity by Phyllis Tickle which explores concerns, organizational patterns, theologies and most pressing questions facing the Church.

Book Study: Climate World, Climate Church

Wednesdays, Feb. 24 - Mar. 24, 7 - 8 p.m.

Join leaders around the San Diego Diocese for a five part study via Zoom on Climate World, Climate Church by Jim Antal which discusses how the church can engage in the urgent moral crisis of climate change.



What is an Episcopalian?

Wednesdays, Feb. 24 - Mar. 24, 7 - 8:30 p.m.

Want to know what it means to be Episcopalian? Join Cathedral staff via Zoom for this five part dive into the history, beliefs and polity of the Episcopal tradition.

Kids Crew: Reflections on Prayer Lenten Series

Sundays, Feb. 21 - Mar. 21, 12 p.m.

Kids ages 4-10 and their families are invited to a five part Zoom series about prayer with storytelling, coloring, and prayer practices.



Youth Crew: Holding Lent

Tuesdays, Feb. 22 - Mar. 23, 6:30 p.m.

Youth ages 11-18 will engage with ancient prayer practices during this five-part Zoom series. The meetings are virtual, but the labyrinths, prayer beads, and journals are real.

View details at: stpaulcathedral.org/lent-2021

February 17, Ash Wednesday

Psalm 32, Jonah 3: 1-4: 11, Hebrews 11: 1-14, Luke 18: 9-14

“God, I thank thee that I am not like other men...” Who of us hasn’t said this at some time? I know I have. And at this point I know I could happily insert certain politicians that I despise (we have lots of them) or others in society that, to me, act shamefully.

Ah, but then I realize I’d be showing a lack of self-awareness. Haven’t I also acted pridefully, foolishly, selfishly, been less than loving, or exhibited too much ego to no good purpose? Of course I have.

Lent is the beginning of a journey into self-awareness: what we cannot admit about ourselves, we can’t repent of, and what we can’t repent of we can’t be saved from.

I think about death more now because of the pandemic and because I’m getting older. And I know that when I die and stand before God’s throne to be judged I can only answer for Peter Robert Joseph Del Nagro. It’s not my place to judge anybody else. Only God is qualified and able to do that. All I’ll be able to say in that moment is, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

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February 18

Psalm 37:1-18, 2 Deuteronomy 7:6-11, Titus 1:1-16, John 1:29-34

“Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.” -Deuteronomy 7:9

Lent is the season during which we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Easter. We often think of it as a time of fasting and self-denial—of “giving something up.” It does offer us a good chance to give up behaviors and attitudes that are not helpful, through repentance. Equally important, however, is the opportunity to replace these unhelpful behaviors and attitudes with new ways of thinking and acting that are beneficial.

As you do this, I hope you will remember how beloved you are. This temporal world will, indeed, give us challenges (2020, I’m talking about you), but God’s love and care for us are sure and certain. When we face problems, we can assure ourselves that “Jesus is bigger.”

Our Psalm for today is a good place to begin—a reminder to trust God and lean on God as our sure source of security. Please spend some time basking in the promises of this wonderful Psalm.

“Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.” -Psalm 37:3

February 19

John 1:35-42

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi,” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

Reflection – What are you looking for?

In this passage Jesus turns around and asks the two disciples who were walking behind him this question. It’s not a transactional question where you would ask a grocery clerk what aisle location the ice cream is; it’s more like what is the intention or reasoning behind your action. For the two disciples, could it be they heard John the Baptist proclaiming that Jesus “will be the Lamb of God and the Savior”? Or did they follow him to see proof that he was the real deal or because they felt a calling or were hoping for transformation in their own lives as they learned the teachings and words of God?

As I journey through my life there have been moments that I question: what I am looking for? At times like this I would sit and reflect, hoping that the correct way forward would occur to me. There were times I felt that I was trying too hard and forcing an answer, or maybe not being 100% truthful with myself. In the end after traveling a few wrong paths I found the right path.

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February 20

Psalm 30, Deuteronomy 7:17-26, Titus 3:1-15, John 1:43-51

In this Lenten season I find myself drawn to Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21. Matthew advises us to do good things for the glory of God, and not for recognition from our peers; to pray in private; to not lay up treasures on Earth. Rather, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” If I covet and then purchase a Rolex watch and an Austin Healy, have I served God? If my treasure is represented by expensive, flashy material goods, where is my heart? My mother used to tell us not to “flash money around,” to “be humble,” to not think the answers were in expensive material goods. As a child, I wondered what on earth she was talking about when I was surrounded by “goods” everywhere, and the expensive goods heaped more praise on the purchaser. As an adult I know she was right. My first duty is to the poor, and if my treasure goes to St Paul’s, or a charity, that’s where my heart will be. I don’t vote for tax cuts for those who don’t need them, and I look for candidates who at least seem to care about the poor. Following the rubrics heaps glory on God and not on me.

February 21

Psalm 63:1-11, Deuteronomy 8:1-10, 1 Corinthians 1:17-31, Mark 2:18-22

As I read and prayed over the above passages, one segment from Corinthians seemed to call my attention once more: “*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.*” OK, I thought! That’s seems easy enough on the face of it. But how do I put real meaning into this?

These past four years and especially this last year, have been a real challenge to me. Many of my family members back east seemed to have been caught up in a belief system that defies reason – at least to me. I did my best to speak with them over Facebook and email but just could not get them to see things from a different perspective. I had to ask myself, how can they follow this man who appears to be so against everything they were brought up to believe in?

After banging my head against the wall and not changing any minds, I looked for a new approach. I was searching for something that could help me understand my relatives and somehow get through to them. It then occurred to me that I should look at this in a different way. I could only convey to them that the God who loves me loves them as well. And, that same God loves all His creation. Whether Christian or Muslim, American or Mexican, gay or straight, Republican, Democrat or whatever – we are all children of God! There are no exceptions. It’s a start. I don’t know that it will change any minds. But, it sure gives me some hope.

So, I do boast in the Lord.

February 22

Psalm 41, Deuteronomy 8:11-20, Hebrews 2:11-18, 1 John 2:1-12

Have you ever been put up to a task for which you were not ready? Maybe it was something you were asked to do at work, to defend a friend or family member in a court case, or maybe, I don't know, to turn water into wine at a wedding where the planners underestimated the number of guests attending? What was your response? Jesus was a bit reluctant to fulfill his mother's request to problem-solve the wine shortage at the Wedding at Cana: "*Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.*" (John 2:4). If you replied to your parent in that manner, what do you think the response would have been? It was thought that this was Jesus' response to what was about to be his first public miracle – to change water into wine (and exceptionally *good* wine at that). He was not ready for this, perhaps caught off-guard, and maybe even a bit embarrassed since he showed up to the wedding with a group of extra friends contributing to the shortage of wine. This shows the very human, emotional side of Jesus. But then he miraculously changed that water into wine. He looked beyond his doubts to do the right thing, and the wedding festivities continued without detriment.

Psalm 41 also reminds us to perhaps do something for which we are not ready – to regularly reach out to the poor, earning God's mercy despite any personal issues, maladies, or bad thoughts about you from others. And weaving in Deuteronomy with this thread, not to arrogantly tout that you have worked hard for your keep, "*forgetting the Lord your God (verse 14),*" denying help to those who have less than ourselves.

My take on today's reflection is that we are human, hardly miracle workers, but should work in earnest, do what we can for others in need, and never forget God's love for us. When Jesus reached the end of his earthly life, it was viewed that his death was appropriate, as brutal as it was to such an innocent man (Hebrews), showing God's ultimate sacrifice to free us from sin, even though Christ may have been scared and reluctant as well. When we are put on the spot in life, asked to do something which may make us defensive, reactive, even scared—if we pray, reflect, and respond in a way that is good for everyone involved, the outcome may be far different than expected.

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February 23

Psalm 45, Deuteronomy 9:4-12, Hebrews 3:1-11, John 2:13-22

After studying Psalm 45, I felt the psalmist is calling us to repent and place our trust in Jesus, who will rule forever and ever. The king in this psalm is the Messiah and the bride is the church. The psalmist calls us to love righteousness and hate wickedness.

Deuteronomy 9:4-12 tells how Moses went up the mountain and stayed 40 days and 40 nights. When he returned to the people, he found that they had returned to their old ways. When we review the life we have lived since last Easter, we may find that we have acted much like the people that God led out of the land of Egypt. Moses gave the people the tablets of the covenant. The tablets helped the people of God to return to the way that God commanded them. During this Lent, let us review our last year to see if we have strayed from the covenant that God made with us. Let us ask ourselves if we have cast an image(s) for ourselves.

Hebrews 3:1-11 tells us that Moses was faithful *in* all God's house as a servant and Jesus was faithful *over* God's house as a son. Since we are children of God through Christ, we are called to be faithful in God's house as well. Lent is the time to review how faithful we have been to God since last Easter. We may find that we have fallen short of the glory of God many times. Lent is the time we can use to find ways we can be faithful in God's house.

In John 2:13-22 Jesus cleanses the Temple: *"Take these things out of here. Stop making my Father's house a marketplace."* He drove out the people selling sheep and cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and turned over their tables. Jesus then reveals His resurrection to the Jews who could not comprehend what Jesus was telling them. I think John calls us to examine our lives during Lent to determine the things in our lives that prevent us from communicating with God. When we discard the things in our lives that prevent us from communicating with God, we will also share in Christ's resurrection.

February 24

Deuteronomy 9:13-21, Psalm 49, Hebrews 3:12-19, John 2:23-3:15

“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3:14-15

Preceding the most cited verse in Christian scripture, this verse is sometimes overlooked but provides critical insight into Jesus’s message of salvation. Jesus references Numbers 21:1-9, when the Israelites blame Moses and God for the hardship of the desert and God sends poisonous snakes in response. With contrite hearts, the Israelites repent of their sin and beg Moses to remove the snakes. Instead of removing the snakes to heal them, God instructs Moses to lift a poisonous snake for everyone to gaze upon and be healed. In his 2019 book *“The Beautiful Letdown: An Addict’s Theology of Addiction,”* our former Faith Formation Director David Tremaine explains that “rather than *removing* the source of suffering, God *transforms* the source of suffering into a source of *healing*... and thus, Jesus says it will be with him” (p. 77). It is through the suffering and wounds of Jesus, “the Son of Man lifted up” on a cross, that we are healed. David writes that believing in Jesus is more than signing up for a specific tenet of doctrine about Him but trusting Him enough to follow the path He has set before us and that He will use the same wounds that destroy us to redeem us. Usually, we try to hide our sins, but Lent gives us the opportunity to raise our wounds “high in the light of day, gaze at them, and let them gaze back at us... to be transformed and let those very sources of suffering be transformed within us...” (p. 78). Jesus invites us to take up our cross, lift up our serpent in the wilderness, and follow him to crucifixion, dying in powerlessness and vulnerability, to resurrection, where the wounds that destroy us will be those that heal us and heal the world (p. 79). Engaging with our sins can be more than just feeling guilty; it is an invitation to engage deeply with ourselves, the world, and our redemptive relationship with God. What serpent shall we lift high in the air for the world to see and have eternal life?

I highly recommend “The Beautiful Letdown”, available on Amazon and through other book retailers. We are all addicts, one way or another.

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February 25

Psalm 50, Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5b, Hebrews 4:1-10, John 3:16-21

The Gospel reading for today is John 3:16-21. This includes a passage most of us can say by heart, John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* I want to reflect on John 3: 20-21.

“For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.”

When I read the Gospel beyond 3:16, the word LIGHT jumped out at me. I thought of something I always did on an airplane, in the pre-Covid days when we could easily travel in the air. I would sit in my airline seat and hope the pilot hadn't just had a fight with their significant other. Then my thoughts would turn more spiritual. I would pray that God would surround the plane with God's LIGHT. I could visualize the plane in a coating of light. I wanted God to be with all of us on that extremely heavy airplane as it was ready to lift off the ground. My prayer was that we would all be safe. There was a dark patch in my life. I don't think I was evil, but I surely wasn't spending my days and nights in God's light. During a very bad time I wanted to go to a church and talk to a priest. I drove past a church two times a day. I never went in because I thought the church pillars would crash down on my head. I knew God was not pleased with me. I later came to KNOW God was with me that whole dark time and led me out of darkness to where I am today.

“But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

May God be with us this Lenten season. Let us remember that when we are in the light it is God who has led us there.

February 26

Psalm 40, Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Hebrews 11:4-16, John 3:22-36

I have often thought over this last year, “What does God want me to do and what is my purpose in a solitary pandemic existence?” All The scriptures for this day seem to offer a simple answer. God wants us to hear and obey Him. He has given us the capacity to do both because He knows how we feel (Hebrews). Psalm 40 says obedience is the greatest sacrifice we can make to Him. God asks for self-offering through obedience to His will. You can be sure that what God tells you will work out if you do it His way. Deuteronomy tells is to walk in all His ways and love Him. There is no reference to any works or deeds here, just, give God yourself. In John, John the Baptist declares, *“He must increase, I must decrease”*.

Ten years ago, while visiting from my adopted home in New Jersey, I felt a tug on my heart and realized God wanted me to return home to San Diego to care of my terminally ill mother. I really did not want to hear or do that. The following Sunday back in my NJ home I attended a local church where the pastor preached an entire sermon on Abraham’s call to leave his home and go to an unknown life and land. He emphasized the need to “obey God’s call,” even if it meant suffering and fear to truly experience God’s blessings on your life. I answered the call, leaving family and friends of 20 years behind, and returned to San Diego.

Over the following five years, while taking care of mom to the end of her journey, I found St Paul’s, I renewed old friendships, made new ones, and indeed have been super blessed these past ten years. In the words of the old gospel song, *“When we walk with the Lord, in the light of His Word, what a glory he sheds on our way, when we do his good will, He abides with us still, with all who will trust and obey. Trust and Obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, is to trust and obey.”*

February 27

Deuteronomy 11:18-28, Psalm 55, Hebrews 5:1-10, John 4:1-26

In today's reading from the Hebrew Bible, Moses is exhorting the Israelites on their rewards for obedience (to the law). Looking at the whole of Chapter 11, Moses uses phrases like, *"If you will only heed his every commandment...then he will give you the rain..."* (11:13-14) and *"If you will diligently observe this entire commandment...then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you..."* (11:22-23). These "if" phrases indicate a conditionality around the covenant between YHWH and his people. Yet the Israelites will repeatedly forget about their part in the deal. This makes me wonder what our society is forgetting about as we get distracted with chants of, "USA! USA!" like we are at a football game.

Today's Gospel reading from John is about the Samaritan woman at the well. Let's forget for a minute how shocking it would have been for Jesus to be talking to a woman that he didn't know and focus just on the Samaritan part. Samaritans were the people left behind during the Babylonian exile in 586 BCE. They built a temple on Mount Gerizim in the West Bank and believed that they were the "true" religion of the ancient Israelites. By the time of Jesus, the Samaritans were a despised group of "others." They worshiped wrong. Remember that a key pillar of Judaism at this time was that worship was conducted in the Temple in Jerusalem. The exhortations against those not seen as part of the Israelite community went so far that Ezra and Nehemiah exhorted men to get rid of the foreign wives they might have taken on during the exile. Yet to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus offers himself as *"a spring of water gushing up to eternal life"* (4:14b) and says, *"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."* (4:24)

With our communities and nation wracked with division and otherness, I'm wondering what I can do to not forget the law and help us remember to love our neighbor as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18...yes, *that* Leviticus). How can we become more like Jesus and see beyond the otherness of the "other" clans and sects we think are so damaging to our fundamental ways of life? How can we help protect and cultivate that spring that gives that eternal life?

February 28

Psalm 24, Jeremiah 1:1-10, 1 Corinthians 3:11-23, Mark 3:31-4:9

I see our story written before us as we move through these readings. First, the whole earth and all that is in it, is the Lord's, who created it all.

Then Jeremiah chimes in regarding us human beings, you and me, individually. How wonderfully affirming (and maybe a little intimidating) it is to realize that I have been known since before I was even conceived (Jeremiah 1:5). I, and every single one of us, are beloved of God! Before the verse even ends, though, we are given our marching orders: *I have appointed you a prophet to the nations. Do not be afraid...I am with you... (verse 8).*

In Corinthians, Paul says that our foundation is Jesus Christ. I think it's important to be grounded in our Creator as we are sent out. It seems that I have always loved Bible stories. There I learned about God and Jesus, and my spiritual ancestors and felt a part of that family that continues today. Mark 3:35 says that whoever does the will of God is Jesus's family.

I volunteer with the Children, Youth and Family ministry because I hope that the young people growing up today can experience that same knowledge of God's love and deep sense of belonging to God's family.

Our children are growing up in a world that sorely needs to know the God of love and how important it is to take care of God's earth and all that is in it. To do this they will need to know who and whose they are. We promised at their baptisms to uphold them in their faith. When we can be back together in church, let's remember to show them their belovedness every chance we get!

March 1

Jeremiah 1:11-19, Psalm 56, Romans 1:1-15, John 4:27-42

As I write this reflection, we as members of the Body of Christ are separated much by distance but not in spirit. In our readings today Paul writes of the separation he is feeling for the brothers and sisters in Rome. He's looking forward to the time he can see them in person. This is much the same way as we do for each other now. Paul reminds, "*Forsake not the gathering together.*"

We are so blessed that technology allows us to gather daily for prayer and fellowship. Yeah, it's not the same as in person, but the *spirit is there* so distance is irrelevant. Paul will eventually get to Rome and spend quite a bit time there. (In spite of a shipwreck along the way.)

We eventually will be together again (hopefully no shipwrecks) and share God's works in us, or as Paul says, "*that you & I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.*" The time we have spent apart will eventually fade like a bad dream. We have traveled, through the dark days of 2020, through time together. We have learned so much (Bob, you're on mute!!) and yet here we are. One spirit, one body, one faith ready to take another step on our voyage through time together.

March 2

Jeremiah 2:1-13, Psalm 61, Romans 1:16-25, John 6:43-54

I am the bread of life, they who come to me shall not hunger, they who believe in me shall not thirst. No one can come to me unless the Father draws them. And I will raise them up ... on the last day. – Hymn 335

Belief is more than intellectual assent. On a deeper level, it is where you are willing to risk your life. Bread is the staple of life. We recall the Hebrews, fleeing the Pharaoh, were given manna (bread) from heaven for their daily sustenance. Give us this day our daily bread.

At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, and said, *“Take, eat, this is my Body given for you, do this in remembrance of me.”* Do this to make me present among you. Eat me that I may be in you and you in me. Abide in me. Jesus said, *“I am the bread of life.”*

The bread of life calls us to abide in him—to believe in him—that ultimate meaning is found in living our lives in his love, power, and mercy. Abiding in Jesus empowers us to act in extraordinary ways.

A few months ago in another city, a man was threatening others and himself with a lethal weapon. The police officer responding engaged the man in conversation for some twenty minutes. As the officer tried to talk with the man, he discovered that he and the man were both veterans.

The disturbed man began to feel more receptive. He finally put down his weapon. Before he was taken to a rehab center, the first officer rushed in to give a hug to the retired soldier. The officer explained that he was overcome with empathy for the man and said, “This vet and I are one.”

“Abide in me.” By abiding in Jesus, the Bread of Life, we become the bread of life—for the life of the world.

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March 3

Psalm 72, Jeremiah 3:6-18, Romans 1:28-2:11, John 5:1-18

In Psalm 72, we read about a just, righteous king who, in the midst of all his power and status, continues to care for and nurture those who are most desperately in need and have no other source of help. This is a leader who *"rescues the poor at the first sign of need, the destitute who have run out of luck. He opens a place in his heart for the down-and-out, he restores the wretched of the earth. He frees them from tyranny and torture - when they bleed, he bleeds; when they die, he dies."* (v.12 - 14, as translated in *The Message.*)

This description of a selfless and self-sacrificing love prefigures the life and message of Jesus Christ. It also resonates in a thought-provoking way at this particular time in our nation's existence. Against the backdrop of a resurgence in intolerance, the violence of the angry mob, and a widening rift between haves and have nots, this Lenten season challenges us to reflect in a very real way about who we are as a reflection of Jesus. We are now painfully aware that some among us are constantly confronted with being devalued, disrespected, and marginalized. Many have influence and power but feel helpless when they see injustice or inequities, resigned to the notion that that's just the way things are right now.

As believers, as a church community and as a nation, what does it mean to use our power and privilege in service to those who have no power and no privileges?

March 4

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28, Psalm 71, Romans 2:12-24, John 5:19-29

We want to believe the best of ourselves. In this I am no different than anyone else. As a scientist, I like to think myself as rational, highly trained in mathematics, reason, and digital logic. But often I am wrong. Dismayed, I find I used not reason but sloppy guesses, ill-formed wishes, and gauzy dreams, only to have Nature say: No, sorry, afraid not.

We believe ourselves good, we believe we *know* what is good and *know* how to act and that we *will* act out of goodness. But this last year in particular has cast cold water on these assumptions. How do we keep ourselves safe; how do we keep others safe? Should we challenge those we disagree with politically? How do we stand up to racism and all other *isms*? If we speak up, are we calling out evil or just raising the temperature? If we stay silent, are we listening or are we complicit through inaction? What if we are making a big mistake? Is *meaning* well good enough?

These readings contain the same sloshing stew of contradictory emotions that filled the last year. Jeremiah is angry at God, and God is angry at His people. The psalmist, facing old age, begs God for protection, pleading he has been a prominent spokesperson for God. Paul calls out our hypocrisy: we love to tell others to do good, but are we sure *we* are doing good? And Jesus, criticized for healing on the Sabbath, defends his actions, in very Johannine highfalutin' language that barely veils the roiling anger underneath, as reflecting the will of the Father. Anger, fear, self-doubt, the desire to be good and the panic that you are not: all are here in these verses.

I want to shed my anger, my fear, my hypocrisy, and even my casual, lazy mistakes. But perfection will not save us, as the psalmist fears and as Paul informs us. Only love for God, frail as that may be, and love from God, ineffable as that may be, is salvation. These concerns transcend the past year. They have been with us since the beginning of the universe, as Jeremiah hints in his description of a world formless and void as if freshly created; they will be with us until the last trumpet sounds and death is defeated, as Jesus declaims. Until then are not alone in our imperfections.

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March 5

Jeremiah 5:1-9, Psalm 73, Romans 2:25-3:18, John 5:30-47

Psalm 73

² *But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
my steps had nearly slipped.*

³ *For I was envious of the arrogant;
I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

Today's readings wrestle with the disparity between righteousness and prosperity—and such a conundrum. The psalmist laments that the wicked increase in riches while the upright stumble. The prophet is given the hopeless task of finding even one honest person in prosperous Jerusalem. Like the psalmist and the prophet, we look around and see that same pattern in our society. All too often we see folks who profit from their neighbors' ills while the "solid citizen" is barely able to squeak by. From that perspective, it seems too much to bear. Here we are, trying our best to follow God's law and look where it gets us. Why doesn't God make it fair?

Then, we're invited to turn to Jesus' teaching and Paul's proclamation where we're given an entirely different perspective. Instead of spending our energy trying to conform our lives to every twist and turn of the law, Jesus turns our attention to the purpose behind the laws: love God and love your neighbor as yourself. That's what the law and the prophets were all about!

Paul makes it more explicit, when you get down to it, "*There is no one who is righteous, not even one.*" But Paul goes on to proclaim Jesus' message: *God knows that you won't be perfect. You are forgiven. Believe.*

We keep trying to make the message more complicated. We keep adding "ifs" and "buts" to the message. Jesus, however, was having none of that. *You are healed. Believe.* There's no "if" there. It's a statement of fact and an invitation to believe.

March 6

Psalm 75, Jeremiah 5:20-31, Romans 3:19-31, John 7:1-13

The scriptures appointed for today center around fear. Psalm 75 was written when people saw God as an avenger, ready to deal out divine retribution at a moment's notice. Jeremiah says, *Aha! See what happens when you don't fear the Lord? You end up in exile.* Even Jesus and his followers in Galilee feared the Jews. At first Jesus avoids going to Judea because, *"My time has not come,"* and he fears dying before he has completed his ministry. Paul tries to calm our fears by proclaiming that we as Christians need have no fear through God's grace and mercy.

Fear, uncertainty, and anxiety are our constant companions in our journey through life. We worry about our children, our families, our friends, and we worry about ourselves. Does that sore throat mean I've contracted Covid19? What if I have? What will happen if I end up in the hospital? Who will take care of me and the affairs of my life when I can't?

Some of our fears arise by our own making. We have done something wrong, hurt someone perhaps, or exercised our pride, or as Jeremiah says, have been treacherous for our own gain, and we are haunted by the fear of knowing we aren't right with God.

All seasons and all days are appropriate to ask God for forgiveness but particularly in Lent we can think again (the origin of the word repent) of what may be our sins committed and things left undone. We are given the gift of redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus if only we ask for it. We can come to the empty tomb rejoicing that we have been released from our fears, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

The Prayer of Self-Dedication (No. 61, page 832, Book of Common Prayer) echoes this reflection.

March 7, 2021

Psalm 93, Jeremiah 6:9-15, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Mark 5:1-20

My body and mind are the House of Lord!

How do we attend our body and mind? A consistent thread among these readings is the outcome of how we feed our mind and body in this mundane world. *“Am I able to wear a splendid apparel like our Lord?”* (Psalm 93)

I occasionally declutter my closet and book collections, because the unwanted materials become obstacles for my living space. Sometimes I also cannot resist the detox products at the supermarkets because I have craved and consumed foods that simply delight my stomach and taste, but not my body and mind.

I question myself: do I have the courage to repent for my sins as if the chained unclean spirits begged Jesus for rescue (Mark 5: 1-20)? Do I have ears closed to hearing the word of God, as warned by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 6:9-15)?

Thanks to Paul, his sharp mind and forceful language, who reminds me of the fragility of human flesh. At the same time Paul enlightens me that the body is the house of God who leads us to an unblemished body (1 Corinthians 6:12-20); and that perhaps our morality will adore the house of Lord (Psalm 93)!

During this Lenten season, instead of searching for detox products or remedies, I will try to “gird myself with strength” refraining from unhealthy foods and ungodly thoughts. Thus, I hope that perhaps my morality will adore the house of Lord, and I can witness the radiance of Lord’s mightiness and splendidness (Psalm 93)!

March 8

Jeremiah 7:1–15, Psalm 80, Romans 4:1–12, John 7:14–36

Today's readings remind me that Lent is a time for me to check my blind spots.

Jeremiah warns the people of Israel—who are apparently unaware of the inconsistency between their worship in the Lord's house and their practices of murder, deception, oppression of the powerless, and idolatry—that God would rather destroy the temple than endure their hypocrisy. How could they not see their own flagrant immorality?

John tells of the Jews' struggle to understand Jesus' identity amid confusing religious debates. How could they be so distracted by technicalities about what is and is not permitted on the sabbath that they missed his power to heal and transform lives?

Paul writes to the church in Rome to straighten out their confusion about who can be a Christian. We are made right with God by faith, not circumcision. What a strange misconception.

It can be frustrating to see how, throughout history, God's people have so often missed the point, but what am I not seeing? Are there ways that I am offending God by satisfying myself at the expense of others? Am I undermining the ministry and unity of the church by loving traditions, institutions, and my place in the hierarchy more than I love God's people or by discounting some people's faith based on their religious pedigree, cultural traditions, or political affiliation?

I must admit that my answers to these questions are sometimes "yes." How should I respond? The psalmist offers a prayer for mercy. Paul reminds us to trust that we will be made righteous through Jesus. Let us give thanks for this amazing gift of grace.

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March 9

Psalm 78:1-39, Jeremiah 7:21-3, Rom. 4:13-25, John 7:37-52

God keeps giving the Israelites undeserved breaks. This we have known from readings like today's Psalm, Jeremiah, and so many others.

God also shows us a path forward, and so many times we the ungrateful have strayed from it.

The world is imbued with the beauty of Creation: the stark beauty of open sky desert, blue ocean's breadth and depth; magnificent lofty mountains, valleys carved in rugged glaciers' wake. Our work is to appreciate our Creator's gifts, yet we allow the misuse of the land, sky, and waters in ways that especially endanger those who have done little to harm it, as well as threaten its myriad and diverse creatures.

Do we have faith in God's love like that of Abraham more than we feel any temptation to abuse Earth for profit's sake? Do we heed the call to love our neighbors as ourselves, to respect the sacred soil on which every person lives by treading softly upon it? Will we finally follow God's will to respect creation in what might be our last chance? Will we live simply, so that others can simply live?

March 10

Psalm 119:97-120, Jeremiah 8:18-9:6, Romans 5:1-11, John 8:12-20

“Don’t tell me what to do.” That’s a phrase so many parents hear, yet a thought that carries over into our adult years as well. Often we think, “I wish I knew what to do. What is the right choice here?”

Our psalmist, in a clever word play using the Hebrew language and alphabet, expresses gratitude for God’s loving guidance and instruction to count on during challenging times; thankfulness for routines and disciplines to get through the days whether in darkness or light.

While we are excused from observing the 631 precepts listed in Deuteronomy, we are not excused from the overarching Great Commandment: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all of thy heart, and all of thy soul, and all of thy mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

It is the work of our lives on earth to learn that difficult lesson, that all of God’s people are our neighbors and how should we express our love for them?

March 11

Psalm 42, Jeremiah 10:11-24, Romans 5:12-21, John 8:21-32

The popular saying, “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” is a lie. Ask a Holocaust survivor, so many of whom took their own lives years after the horrors ended. There are experiences which shake us so profoundly that we are never quite the same. Something once secure has been dislodged. I don’t know if the pandemic is this type of thing—I suspect it varies for each of us—but I believe the Trump presidency has undermined Americans’ fundamental belief in our goodness. I don’t know how easy it will be to get that back.

The writer of Psalm 42 has lost his or her God and now yearns for that God “as a deer longs for flowing streams.” (We must stop for a moment to admire the beauty of this language—the whole psalm is shot through with poetry!) S/He remembers the joys of worship together and wonders out loud:

I say to God my rock,

Why have you forgotten me?

This, for me, is the heart of the psalm. The psalmist acknowledges that his/her life is built on nothing but God, but that God appears to be absent. A once flourishing conversation has gone quiet. This resonates. Like many others, I suspect, this past year has brought up old faith questions for me. God seems to have retreated somewhat and I am left with something gray, indistinct. I am suspicious of easy answers, but there *is* an answer to this—it is *the cross and the resurrection*. Echoing lines such as these, Jesus said upon the cross, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” If Jesus, the Son of God, can, in extremis, loose that connection, we should not, must not despair. Hope is not born of good times; hope is born of calamity.

Just now there is a mourning dove outside my window preening on our wooden fence. The dove is sitting still but soon it will fly!

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March 12

Jeremiah 11: 1-8, 14-20, Psalm 88, Romans 6:1-11, John 8: 33-47

Two passages in particular, from Psalms and John, beckoned me to two paths that eventually converged.

It's embarrassingly easy for me to get lost. So first thing, I read the wrong Psalm, but that mistake led me to a short search to for how Jewish theologians translated these lines:

O Lord, why dost thou cast me off? Why dost thou hide thy face from me? Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer thy terrors: I am helpless. Psalm 88: 14 & 15

An on-line source* translated "*I am helpless*" as "*I am distracted.*"

That hit home. These last four years, I have worried and fretted. I am distracted. I have felt God's face is hidden. But the Psalmist makes me face the truth—I haven't trusted enough to look in the right direction.

In John 8:42, Jesus said, "*If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God . . .*"

He evoked a memory from a dark time. A monk who was a friend of a friend ministered to my deep pain with a look of such compassion, I felt seen through Jesus' eyes. I'm left with no option but to believe Jesus' words and His love.

God has not cast me off or hidden Their** face from me. Instead, God gave me a representative of Their face.

My prayer is to be engaged, but not distracted.

* Hebrew Interlinear Bible (OT) found at scripture4all.org

**Their just kind of appeared as the pronoun to use for God's—it reminds me that God is too inclusive to be limited to His or Her.

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March 13

Psalm 87, Jeremiah 13:1-11, Romans 6:12-23, John 8:47-59

Lent is a time to turn inward, and to listen to our innermost self. It is a quiet season of pause in the Christian year when we can look deeply at what is guiding (or driving) us, and to ask ourselves whether we are responding in love or reacting in fear to the challenges and the joys that make up our everyday lives.

Today's Old Testament scriptures remind us that we all have our home with God, and as his beloved creations, we need only listen to his incarnate Word to know lasting peace of heart and mind. All we have to do is listen, and we will know where our heart's true home lies. If we listen well, over time our thoughts will change for the good, along with our actions.

It often happens, however, that we refuse to do this simple thing. Life's daily distractions are so much louder and seem so much more compelling in the moment.

As I read Paul's Roman epistle for today, I reflected that Paul's message is basically telling Romans that God in Christ rescued Christian believers from the mud of ignorance and habit by baptism. The challenge they face now is resisting the urge to return to the familiarity of being covered in mud.

In this time of listening to the deep inner chambers of the heart, I am asking myself:

Am I being guided by my heart, or am I being driven by my ego?

If I am reacting and resisting, as opposed to responding and accepting, how do I show compassion for myself afterwards?

May we all find peace in this difficult Lenten season.

March 14

Psalm 66, Jeremiah 14:1, 17-22, Galatians 4:21,5:1, Mark 8:11-21

Lent, that dark time of the year, invites us to turn inward and take stock. This past year seems unique for the ways it has frightened and angered us, and in too many cases killed us. Plague, drought, and dissent are everywhere.

All over the planet people cry, *“because the ground is cracked, because there has been no rain and the farmers are dismayed...”* (Jeremiah 14:4).

And the electric air is full of noise as *“...both prophet and priest ply their trade throughout the land and have no knowledge”* (Jeremiah 14:18). Truly not much has changed since biblical times.

But Psalm 66 asks us *“To make a joyful noise to God... sing the glory of his name...come and see what God has done.”* (1-5)

During Lent I turn to the poetry of Mary Oliver to help focus my attention, not on the turmoil in the world, but on its beauty. Paying attention is the best way to praise God.

From “The Messenger”

*My work is loving the world.
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird—
Are my boots too old? Is my coat torn?
Am I no longer young, and still not half perfect?
Let me keep my mind on what matters, which is my work,
Which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished...
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,
Which is gratitude, to be given a mind and heart and these “body clothes,”
A mouth with which to give shouts of joy to the moth and the wren, to the
sleepy dug up clam, telling them over and over, how it is we live forever.*

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March 15

Psalm 89; 1-18, Jeremiah 16;10-21, Romans 7:1-12, John 6:1-15

What exactly do we expect from God? We already know that God's love surpasses all understanding and that we are eternally blessed by God, but, whatever our expectations, they are miniscule in comparison to what God can (and will) *really* do for us! What can our tiny gifts do in comparison to God's power?

The Feeding of the Five Thousand is the only miracle performed by Jesus that is told in all four Gospels, besides the Resurrection. According to John, Jesus had just healed on the Sabbath, which was an obvious violation of the law and the authorities persecuted Jesus for this action. This was the act that started the Passion story. This is when they decided Jesus must die. But Jesus did not let this stop the love and caring.

After all this, Jesus moved over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee and a large crowd just kept following! The disciples were getting worried that these people would not get to buy their food in time and wanted to send everyone away, but Jesus, being Jesus, said, "No. You give them something to eat!" Andrew didn't really understand what good such little food was going to do for such a large crowd, but Jesus used that small gift to meet the needs of God's people.

With just five loaves of bread and two fish that a boy gave to Jesus, thousands upon thousands were fed that day. This was such a small gift used to take care of so many!

Our prayers, our gifts, our worship—whether from home looking at a screen or sitting in the sacred space of a church building—no matter how small they may seem to us are used, in plenty, by God for the nurture of God's people.

During this Lenten season, reflect on the sacrifices we have had to make regarding our corporate worship, our fellowship, our human connection, our overall daily lives. This has been no small sacrifice, yet we press on and move forward because we know that our God will not abandon us, ever.

The love that Jesus showed to that crowd that day is the same love shown to us today. Our sacrifices will not go unnoticed by our Savior.

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March 16

Jeremiah 17:19-27, Psalm 97, Romans 7:13-25, John 16, 16-27

Today's reading speaks a lot about sin and laws to help prevent sin. A rather dismal topic but don't worry, there's good news too. Jeremiah begins by telling us to keep the Sabbath holy. But how about those that have to work: policemen, firemen, doctors, nurses and even our own priests? God didn't want mechanical obedience to this law but rather obedience that came from the heart, which can be done any day of the week.

Paul speaks about his sinful nature. He knows what is right but his sinful nature causes him to sin. Remember Flip Wilson saying, "The Devil made me do it"? I think we can all relate to this at times in our lives. But, "Thanks be to God, who delivers us through Jesus Christ!"

How many of us would have liked to be among the multitude that were fed in Capernaum? Would we have followed him because we were fed or because of witnessing the miracle? How often do we satisfy our carnal needs before spiritual needs?

And finally, the good news. Psalm 97 really spoke to me the way the Lord knows all that is going on in His creation. He sees us today as we go through such difficult times. However, *"Light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright heart."* Hallelujah!!

March 17

Jeremiah 18:1-11, Psalm 101, Romans 8:1-11, John 6:27-40

I think one observation is that today's readings reminds us that we are often being invited to be that someone who causes a change, a redirection, a reformation in others and in our world. Jeremiah was invited to the potter's house where the Lord tells him to share with others the importance of amending their ways and shaping up so God's goodness can be manifested in them. Jeremiah was called to be the catalyst for this repentance. Like Jeremiah, we are also called to be that incentive for others to change direction to follow a path to righteousness, peace, and wholeness. *"...and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him."*

Paul explains that through the presence of God, the Spirit, we are invited to set our minds on things that are life-giving not only for ourselves, but also for others. Our act of repenting and turning toward God can be an initiative which guides our Lenten path where, as the psalmist says, *"I will walk with integrity of heart..."*

March 18

Psalm 69:1-23, Jeremiah 22:13-23, Romans 8:28-39, John 6:52-59

Jeremiah 22:13-23, A Cautionary Tale

As I read and reflected on this passage, the message of disengaging from the folly of luxury and the reevaluation of who you are in relation to these “things” and items of luxury was a strong one.

“Don’t do it or you’ll be sorry!” it seems Jeremiah is saying. Listen now, while you have these resources, not when things have turned against you and you’re desperate for salvation.

There are very specific call outs about what not to do, how not to fall into the trappings of wealth. There is even a specific detail mentioned of “paneling it with cedar and painting it with vermilion” calling out the luxurious materials and finishes of the day. What would our fancy finishes and materials be today? How does this call out to those of us who do have luxurious items/finishes/homes/wealth/privilege?

How likely would we be to move away from our luxurious trappings if we were confronted by Jeremiah? Could we do it? How hard would it be? Who are we if it is too hard to imagine our lives without these things?

Jeremiah warns of how bad it’s going to be, “...*how you will groan when pangs come upon you, pain as a woman in labor!*” if we don’t heed his warnings. This was the second reference to labor pains I read in preparing for my Lenten Reflection selection (see also Romans 8:21-22). This curse of labor pains seems to be a “worst case scenario” wish upon those cursed with it. Fear that the pain and suffering will be worse than the loss of the luxury is the threat. How would you respond to a threat of the worst pain imaginable? Does it help you to disengage? How does Lent lend itself to disengaging with excesses and recalibrating things for you?

March 19

Jeremiah 23:1-8, Psalm 102, Romans 8:28-39, John 6:52-59

Receiving Holy Communion is one of the most intense sacramental union with God and we experience this not only with our own personal intimacy, but we also share it with all. A mystical union with all present.

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (John 6:56). This propounds the idea of eating bread to sustain us as we journey through this life. It also creates Christ’s risen life preparing us for what is ahead. *“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day”* (John 6:54).

I miss gathering for communion with others and consuming the bread that nourishes our soul in Christ. It has been over a year by this time in March. In Lent, many of us practice abstinence of emitting certain foods or pleasures. At no time, did I ever think that we would not engage in this nourishment offered to us by Jesus. Our behavior of giving things up is sometimes from a place of privilege. On another level, we feel our weakness and vulnerability in cravings. My prayer is that we and, especially I grow in my compassion towards those who “do without” every day of their lives. I do realize the need for grace and our dependence on God, the giver of all gifts. My other prayer is to give myself over to love. Keep my attention tuned to that love during this troubling time and search for joy and gratitude in the small things. It is important to find the courage to believe in what we cannot see and experience the mystery of faith.

March 20

Jeremiah 23:9-15, Psalm 108, Romans 9:1-18, John 6:60-71

How do we react when God does things wrong? When God does not behave the way we think God should behave? We find a variety of possibilities in today's readings.

The psalmist, desperate because God "*is not going out with our armies,*" appeals to God's pride, reminding God that God is more powerful than the gods of the conquering nations. On the other hand, the prophets whom Jeremiah is condemning have decided that the gods of the other nations have proved to be more powerful, and they have decided to speak in those gods' names and act according to their standards, abandoning Israel's God. Paul, feeling like a failure because God's ancient people, the Jews, are not rushing to accept the new religion that Paul feels he has been told by God to proclaim, seems to blame himself for God's failure to make God's new word understood and accepted.

Only Peter—Peter who later loses his courage and denies that he even knows Jesus—seems to "get it." In the gospel reading, Jesus' followers are finding his words too hard to understand and are abandoning him. Little wonder. Jesus, whom the crowd saw as "*the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know,*" has been talking about being "*the living bread who came down from heaven,*" and claiming that only through him can anyone see God, and that whoever eats his flesh will live forever. The response, "*This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?*" is hardly unreasonable for people who were really looking to Jesus to be a messiah who would rescue them from their conquerors. That they could have understood.

However, when Jesus asks his closest disciples, "*Do you also wish to go away?*" Peter, with unusual insight, responds, "*Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.*"

Perhaps Peter has given us something to think about here. When things are at their bleakest, when we feel God has abandoned us, perhaps our knee-jerk reaction of wanting to make things the way they were before, to want God to act the way we think God should act, is not the best response. Perhaps instead we might take a thoughtful, faithful look at the new situation and see if we can find in it a new life-giving word from God.

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March 21

Jeremiah 23: 16-32, I Corinthians 9: 19-27, Mark 8: 31-9:1

Jeremiah was born in perilous times. Just as his tiny Kingdom of Judah lay close to the fault line of massive tectonic plates in the Jordan Valley, so too, it lay between two aggressive superpowers, Egypt and Assyria. The Lord speaking through Jeremiah, asked this simple but profound question aimed at the Judeans' fears, "*Am I a God nearby and not a God far off?*"

God asked the same question of me when our only daughter was born three months early at a pound and a half. Our tiny baby's struggle to breathe, to stay warm, to take in nourishment gripped me with a spiritual panic. Where was God? It seemed that our daughter was in a secret place where God could not see and that God's love did not fill all the spaces in heaven and earth. What came to me as I held her body, so fragile and precious, were the first lines of hymns, "*Christ, whose glory fills the skies,*" "*My faith looks up to thee,*" and "*Dear Lord and Father of mankind.*" They were my centering prayers and I sang to her for hours each day in the neo-natal intensive care unit.

Happily, we took Amanda home after a rather traumatic month, at a whopping five pounds and with the lungs of an opera diva. Her doctors said the critical challenges she faced as a preemie would never significantly delay her progress. Thanks be to God!

Jeremiah's ministry did not affect a beneficial spiritual or political change in the hearts of the Judeans. Moreover, actions taken by Judah's rulers, motivated by a pernicious desire for temporal security, did not forestall a disastrous takeover by Assyria. Jeremiah cautions us as well, some 2,600 years later, in our equally perilous times. The just and peaceful resolution of a difficult problem can be a prolonged, sometimes disheartening process. "*How long,*" asks the great-souled prophet, "*will it take for his people to discriminate between the easy answers of popular prophets and solutions which require Godly perseverance, creativity and unalloyed trust?*" Yet he asks his people to consider God's loving presence which never, ever abandons us.

March 22

Jeremiah 24: 1-10, Psalm 35, Romans 9:19-27, John 9:1-17

I have chosen the gospel lesson of John. In the ninth book of John, Jesus gives sight to a man that has been blind since birth. The disciples asked Jesus, who sinned the man or his parents. Jesus' answer was that he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed to him.

When I was born, I could see as well as any newborn and went on my way through seeing very clearly it seemed. I could drive a car and do all the things that people with good sight can do.

A few weeks ago, I learned that there are different types of sight. I had purchased paint and it had to be mixed for the color I had chosen. It seems paint is all white and then the colors are added so that we can have colors that we want in our homes. I got home and learned that the correct additives had not been put in the paint, so I trekked back to the store. I explained the problem and the correction was made. I was handed the color I had chosen, and the clerk said, "Just show your receipt when you go through check out." I explained I don't have a receipt. He stopped and looked at me. His response, "I will mark it paid." I looked at him and then I COULD SEE, I was experiencing white privilege.

What would have been his response if I were not white? After the *Waking up White* book study and now *Sacred Ground* program, my eyes can now see what I have experienced all my life. The paint experience made it an epiphany moment; I now knew what I had been reading about. It happened to me.

I am thankful that these programs have been offered at St Paul's. Thankful, too, for my classmates that participate with me. God's works have been revealed to me.

March 23

Jeremiah 25:8-17, Psalm 121, Romans 10:1-13, John 9:18-41

The theme that ran through most of these readings is that of a paternal God. People are helpless and the Lord will provide them with security, will support and protect them and will shield them from harm. Cling to God and obey him because He is the Father.

In John, it is made clear that it is more important that your trust be put in God and that you do as God tells you to. Action is not a matter of righteousness; it is very much of the heart. Mosaic law is specific and has exacting rules. Instead of laws, Jesus is preaching faith. *“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*

In Romans it is again emphasized that if you are obtaining righteousness from the law instead of God and faith you are not fully embracing God.

Finally, Jesus tells the parable of healing the blind man where the Jews do not believe that he had been blind. When questioned about this, Jesus responds that the act should be self-evident. If you have eyes, you can see. If you were blind, I would excuse you. Instead, you deny the truth even though you can see. The earthly distractions from the word of God caused them to be blind. They are slaves to the material world and the word of God offers a way out of this slavery.

March 24

Psalm 128, Jeremiah 25:30-38, Romans 10:14-21, John 10:1-18

In the passage from Jeremiah, the LORD condemns “the shepherds” and “the lords of the flock,” telling them to “*wail and cry out, roll in ashes...for the days of your slaughter have come.... Flight shall fail the shepherds, and there shall be no escape for the lords of the flock.*” This terrifying judgement is not directed at literal shepherds but at the corrupt leaders of Israel whom Jeremiah holds responsible for leading the nation astray, culminating in their captivity in Babylon.

In John, Jesus portrays Himself in stark contrast to those false shepherds. He declares himself to be “the gate” through which true shepherds enter the sheepfold and through which they lead their sheep safely to pasture by the trusted sound of their voice. He also says that He is the “Good Shepherd” who willingly lays His life down for his sheep, who “*came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*”

He also says, “*When he (the true shepherd) has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.*”

I think this last verse suggests a focus for our Lenten practice: Let us take a bit more time to quietly open our hearts and listen a more intently for His voice, the voice of the Good Shepherd who leads us safely to pasture, and Who came to give us abundant life.

March 25

Psalm 131, Jeremiah 26:1-16, Roman 11:1-12, John 10:19-42

This is my first time writing a reflection for the Lenten Season. I hope I convey to you, how each passage spoke to me.

As I study Psalm 131, I believe the psalmist is imploring the Israelites to humble themselves before the Lord and to have faith in him. The last paragraph in the Psalm, *“O Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore,”* ties in the other passages.

God sent His prophets time and time again to the Israelites, telling them to heed His words and laws. God wanted them to have faith in Him and to show their faith. However, His people chose not to listen to His words, and instead seized the prophet intending to do him harm. The intervention of the city officials to keep the mob from harming Jeremiah, I think, saved them from God’s wrath.

Jesus reminded the people that God has never disowned them, that we have never stumbled so far that we are not redeemable. Even when the people are killing His prophets, tearing down His altars, and disobeying His laws, God still thinks that we are redeemable. Knowing the magnificence of God’s love for me is life affirming and strengthen my faith.

In the gospel of John, Jesus the only Son of God was commanded by unbelieving Jews to prove that he was the Messiah. Jesus did not tell them; instead He let His actions speak for Him. The unbelievers still did not understand or accept Him for doing things they considered blasphemous in their narrow views and like the prophets, Jesus was doubted, ridiculed, and almost arrested. Would I be one of those unbelievers expecting Jesus to tell me in plain words that He is the Savior, or would I know who He is by his actions? I would like to think that I would recognize Him.

In this Lenten season, this is our time for quiet reflection and to refocus on our faith, to cast aside our doubts, our fears, and to let our actions speak to who we are as Christians. Renewing our faith in God and His Son, who was sent for our redemption. Love each other, be kind to one another and love God with all your heart and with all your might!

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March 26

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-13, Psalm 22, Romans 11:13-24, John 11:1-27, 12:1-10

Today we fall through the layers of history to the time when Jeremiah wrote a letter of hope and comfort to the people of Judah. They had been exiled by God from Jerusalem to Babylon. Having been carried into captivity, their lives were turned upside down. In Babylon, they were to build houses, plant gardens, marry and have children, and to prepare for a long sojourn. It was more important than ever that the people should hold onto their faith.

As with other prophetic Biblical passages, Jeremiah's letter was not written directly to us. Still, it has enduring significance, especially when applied to how our way of life has been turned upside down over the past year.

For me, the pandemic has made me feel like I, too, have been carried into captivity. Like many others, I have felt cut off from large parts of society and normal patterns of life. I find that I have been confronted with a distinct set of challenges—not necessarily more or less severe than others, but different. Last March, as the pandemic spread, I moved back to San Diego. My few friends here were already bubbling with partners and family. Being unable to make new friends has robbed me of the hope that can sustain me through rough times. Whatever timeline I had for myself, the current environment has thrown a serious wrench into it.

Yet, I find encouragement in Jeremiah's words to the people of Judah. Even in the midst of their exile, God was not done with them. They were to still trust in God and bloom where they were planted. As I hunker down in the midst of this pandemic, I strive to do the same. Admittedly, though, there are days when I feel awash in doubt and sorrow. At these times, I am reminded of the final verse from Jeremiah, a timeless promise from God:

"...when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart...."

During this Lenten season, I am reminded that God will never abandon us; that whatever happens to us or wherever we go, God is always with us.

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 17 – April 3

March 27

Psalm 137:1-9; Jeremiah 31:27-34; Romans 11:25-36; John 11:28-44 or 12:37-50

Psalm 137 finds us sitting and weeping with the Hebrews by the waters of Babylon, and then hearing their anger and desire for revenge. They had broken the Covenant with God, been conquered, and were now in exile. They blamed everyone else for their captivity.

Paul's letter to the Romans reveals that Covenant that Jeremiah prophesied and says that, *"God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all."* And finally, John's Gospel quotes Isaiah: *"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart—and turn and I would heal them."*

We are not so far removed from either the ancient Hebrews nor the early Christians in terms of being captives and sometimes having hard hearts. We are often captive to sin in the form of pride, hurt feelings, an unwillingness to forgive someone, and a solid anger toward other people. We would rather hold on to our comfortable pride, convinced in our rightness, and the positive fact that the other person needs to apologize to us. But in this season of Lent and on this Saturday before Palm Sunday, we can cleanse our hearts and return to our rightful mind, as the hymn has it, recognizing the burden of anger or displeasure or resentment for what it is: sin. We have the open invitation of God's grace to pray for a fuller measure of mercy for ourselves as we extend it to others, preparing ourselves to reenter Christ's glory. We can rid ourselves of useless hurt feelings that take so much maintenance and find peace with ourselves, with others, and with God. Jesus said, *"I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness."* Jesus will rise from the darkness of the grave next week and we can rise into that very light but we can only rise with him once we leave our own darkness of sin behind, buried forever.

March 28, Palm Sunday

Psalm 29; Zechariah 9:9-12; 1 Timothy 6:12-16

Biblical scholar Marcus Borg made well known a historical fact about Palm Sunday: at the same time the procession of a donkey among the palms was happening on one end of Jerusalem, the Roman governor was entering Jerusalem on the other side of town in a dramatic military parade. Pilate's entry into Jerusalem was to intimidate anyone who, at the sacred time of Passover, might dare to speak against Roman occupation.

Jesus planned his entry on a donkey, drawing upon the verse from Zechariah, to culminate his ministry by setting up Holy Week as a conflict between peace and war; between the powerful empire and those it oppressed; between the powers and principalities of this world and the kingdom of God. It is impossible to read these verses and come away thinking that Christianity is apolitical.

Fast forward to a year in which an angry mob, trained in the way of the warhorse and empire, hungry to retain power over groups long oppressed through racism, misogyny, and other unhappy legacies of this nation, stormed the capital with tools of violence.

What is the way of the donkey here? What do we have to learn from a time so long ago when this week, so central to our faith, was framed by the threat of war and violence, and Jesus' response was—a donkey?

The way of the warhorse counts its victories in bodies, trusting that whoever can incur the highest body count on the other side will win. Perhaps the way of the donkey places its hope not in how many bodies lie on the other side, nor how many bodies remain standing on "our" side, but instead on trust that there is transformed life if we dare look beyond the tools of violence to a new way of life based not in war, but in love, justice, and peace.

March 29

Psalms 51:1-18, Jeremiah 12:1-16, Philippians 3:1-14, John 9-19

When I was younger, I struggled with identifying with the Israelites in their story throughout the Hebrew scriptures; often wondering, “What is wrong with them—don’t they see all that God has done?” I ignorantly saw myself equal to and like the prophet Jeremiah as he lamented the waywardness of God’s chosen people. I was indignantly repulsed by the Sadducees and Pharisees whom I read about in scriptures and heard about in Sunday sermons; offended by their self-righteous arrogance and commitment to self-preservation. As I aged (not necessarily maturing) I found myself alone and at “war” with my faith tradition which I eventually rejected outright. After the death of my identical twin, I became addicted to meth and suffered the consequences of homelessness and incarceration. (Read waywardness)

Ironically, it was at the end of this road that I found that God had been there all long. I had been blinded by resentment, arrogance, self-obsession and self-centered fear—not so vastly different than the Israelites or the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. It was in my struggle and brokenness that I found a connection to all humanity—in fact, all living things. This is where I so identify with King David as he pleads in the Psalms.

These days as I find myself among the protagonists and antagonists of scripture, I have come to learn time and time again that it is only through God that I can do anything. It is during this season of Lent that I, a wayward soul dependent on God’s faithfulness, turn again in a never ending cycle of committing and recommitting.

So, I join in prayer with King David today, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.*”

Amen

March 30

Jeremiah 15:10-21, Psalm 6, Philippians 3:15-21, John 12:20-26

Throughout history, we have struggled with the meaning of suffering and death.

Are suffering—and death—things that we bring up on ourselves? Today's Psalm, entitled *Prayer for Recovery from Grave Illness*, answers this question, at least in part, in the affirmative. It ascribes the afflicted's suffering to a rebuke for his or her own shortcomings.

Jeremiah, in today's reading, disagrees. He angrily claims to have done everything right, yet he suffers anyway—undeservedly. *Why is my pain unceasing?* he demands of God; *I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me . . . I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice.* Jeremiah feels betrayed by God: *truly to me you are like a deceitful brook.*

Jesus, like Jeremiah, is innocent, yet still suffers a brutal death. Like Jeremiah, in his suffering, Jesus expresses a similar sentiment: *my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

Whether suffering and death are things we bring upon ourselves, things that happen for no apparent reason, or some combination of the two, Jesus reassures us that all is not in vain: *[v]ery truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

March 31

Psalm 74, Jeremiah 17:5-10; 14-17, Philippians 4:1-13, John 12:27-36

On Wednesday of Holy Week, St. Paul's celebrates Tenebrae. A service of readings and responses, Tenebrae features the gradual extinguishing of candles, followed by the relighting of the light of Christ.

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

For me, what unites today's passages is the assurance that faith and trust in God's love help us to overcome suffering. The psalmist reminds us that God continues to do great things, even in times of national humiliation. Jeremiah tells us, *"Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD."* Paul advises the Philippians, *"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* And John quotes Jesus as saying, *"Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."*

Nothing is too big for God. Nothing is too small for God. Today, let us savor our time in darkness with the knowledge that God's love will guide us toward the light.

April 1, Maundy Thursday

Jeremiah 20:7-11, Psalm 142, 1 Corinthians 10:14-17;11:27-32, John 17:1-11,12-26

Our lessons for today all lead to Jesus' prayer for his people. Jesus recognizes that when He is gone, His followers, both the apostles and the wider church will need the protection of God.

In the story from Jeremiah, the prophet whines about how much he is persecuted for doing God's will. He considers just keeping quiet but knows there would be a *"burning fire shut up in [his] bones"*. This makes me think of how I feel when I see Facebook postings that completely misrepresent what we were taught by Christ to say and do. I frequently assign a hashtag of #fakechristian to those posts and try to explain my understanding of the words or actions of Jesus that apply to the situation. In the past worried about how others might perceive the audacity of my views. I have decided with all the damage done by the false prophets of evangelical social media "Christians" that I, as did Jeremiah, have no choice but to speak.

In Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth the members are told to examine and judge themselves before taking the body and blood of communion. If they wait to be judged by the Lord, they will face his discipline. If they judge themselves and know their own faults, they will not be judged. This constant self-examination and self-recognition are crucial to being a true part of the Body of Christ. Through this self-examination, we recognize that we are in trouble, but that God knows our path in life. As today's Psalm says, *"When my spirit is faint, you know my way."* The psalmist asks for God's help and protection from his persecutors, as should we.

In the prayer for His disciples in the reading from John, Jesus reminds His Father that He has done everything asked, as have His followers. They have put their lives at risk to spread the Word. Jesus knows that soon He will no longer be able to protect them from their persecutors. He is concerned for them just as Jeremiah was concerned for himself. He implores God to protect them from those in the world that have come to hate them for the Gospel they proclaim, so that they can continue to make His way known. I try to trust that the Lord will protect me as I strive to live in the world declaring the Love that is in understanding God's intentions for our broken world. Do you do the same?

April 2, Good Friday

Wisdom 1:16–2:1, 2;12-22; Psalm 40:1-19; 1 Peter 1:10-20; John 13:36-38

“I waited patiently for the LORD.” (Psalm 40:1)

During his public ministry, Jesus was almost constantly *active*: calling, healing, consoling, rebuking, encouraging, creating striking parables and metaphors for the Kingdom.

From the moment of his handing over in the Garden of Gethsemane until His body was laid in the tomb, though, He *did* virtually nothing, but allowed Himself to be subject to whatever the Romans, the Temple authorities, and a violent mob decided to do to Him.

Those hours are called His Passion, from a Greek word meaning “for someone to be acted upon,” which is also the source of the word *passive*, the opposite of *active*. Jesus had nothing to do then but to *wait*.

Today, many people in retirement, or in long-term illness, or in unemployment or homelessness, live in the waiting state described by the word *passion*. They need to be helped and supported by others. And in modern society this is often a dishonored position; our world promotes action, busyness, purpose, agency, and often shames people who lack them.

God, though, has sanctified and made honorable “the stature of waiting” (to quote the title of a small book by the Rev. W.H. Vanstone). The Creator rested, not because the Eternal One needs physical rest, but perhaps just to enjoy the creation that God had already seen to be good, and good, and very good. Jesus sanctified waiting just as He had earlier sanctified action, by announcing at the Last Supper that His “work” was finished, and then putting Himself in a position of passion, of waiting for others to act.

And whenever we carry out the great commandment to love our neighbor, we do the same. We take some action because of love, and then we wait. Our offer may be accepted, or rejected, or ignored. We have no control over what happens to the bread we cast upon the waters.

But we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus himself stood in solidarity with us when he performed his great act of love for the world and then waited for the answer. And as the author of another psalm wrote, the way toward knowing God is to “be still.”

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April 3, Holy Saturday

Psalm 95, Job 19:21-27a, Hebrews 4:1-16, Romans 8:1-11

Psalm 95 is a familiar passage that exclaims the greatness of God. God is described as “*A great King above all gods*” who owns the mountains and the seas, and holds the depths of the earth in His hands. God, the rock of our salvation, is surely worthy of all the shouts of praise, songs, and joyful sounds we can muster! But what is the response we offer, what is the sound we make, when this great God puts on flesh, becomes human, and then... dies?

What do we do when God suffers death?

This question sounds strange to a Church who lives on this side of the resurrection, for we know that the grave is not the last word. And besides, we’d rather jump to the end of this story. But let us not hurry on to Easter, not just yet... Holy Saturday marks the day when the grave was still shut; death was still in the air. Christ laid in darkness, as he “descended to the dead.” An unsettling picture of “the Lord our Maker.” But why must we wait? Why not move on to the *empty* grave? Why sit in the darkness of death? Because it is only in death, that God’s true nature is revealed:

The Great King rules not by absolute power, but by absolute love.

Jesus could have used might to announce his reign, but instead it was love that He wanted us to know. And it was in His death that His love was most clearly seen. The self-giving love of God is underlined in His resurrection, this much is true. But it is in His death that it was written for all to see.

Today, let our hearts faint with Job: our Redeemer lives, but only after dying. Today, let us sit with the Romans: we are alive in the Spirit, yet still bound by flesh and sin. Today, let us wonder in awe with the Hebrews: our High Priest has sympathized with us in our final weakness: death.

What do we do when God dies?

We sit in silence, loved.

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April 4, The Day of Resurrection

Psalm 118:1-2,14-24, Colossians 3:1-4, John 20:1-18

When I lived in New Hampshire I experienced spring as one explosive day in the last week of April, followed immediately by summer. In Virginia, spring was flamboyant and extended, adorned with azaleas and magnolias. It's different here, with our relatively narrow range of temperatures and weather phenomena. Maybe I imagine it, but I believe that there are subtle signs of spring in San Diego. There's a moment when I notice that the birds have changed their songs: they become more insistent and operatic as they woo their mates. And there are trees that flower only at this time of year, most notably the jacarandas with their purple or orange blossoms.

When I imagine the scene that St. John describes in today's Gospel reading, I imagine Mary finding her way in the cold and dark to the garden, lost in a winter of grief, her faith buried like a seed in the frozen soil. When she sees the open tomb, she can only imagine that something terrible has happened, on top of all the terrible things that have happened over the last few days. But when she returns and stays by the tomb, after the men have left, her tears water and thaw the ground of her heart, until she can turn and see her risen Lord, silhouetted against the dawn. And the seed of hope sprouts. As the light strengthens, so does her conviction that there is indeed life after death. And as the joy comes to full bloom, she brings the news of spring, of life and transformation to her brothers and sisters, becoming the Apostle to the apostles.

As we emerge from the dark days of Lent, we look for the signs of new life that tell us Christ is risen. What has changed in our world? On this day of resurrection, we rejoice to know that with Mary's news the world was changed forever, and we are eternally loved by our living, life-giving, and liberating Savior. Alleluia, Christ is risen!

40 DAYS



LENT

Feb 17: Peter Del Nagro
Feb 18: Craig Monsell
Feb 19: Jen Jow
Feb 20: Terry Kelly
Feb 21: John Will
Feb 22: David Spencer
Feb 23: Jerry Motto
Feb 24: Maya Little-Saña
Feb 25: Joanna Airhart
Feb 26: Susan Jester
Feb 27: Mark Patzman
Feb 28: Carolyn Lief
Mar 1: Bob Osle
Mar 2: Richard Lief
Mar 3: Rockette Ewell
Mar 4: Calvin Johnson
Mar 5: Robert Holt
Mar 6: Robert Heylman
Mar 7: Diana Chou
Mar 8: Jairus Kleinert
Mar 9: Diane Lopez Hughes
Mar 10: Rachel Kopel
Mar 11: Philip Petrie
Mar 12: Cindy Schuricht
Mar 13: Daniel Love
Mar 14: Claudia Dixon
Mar 15: Don Mitchell
Mar 16: Pat Kreder
Mar 17: Brooks Mason

Mar 18: Kathleen Burgess
Mar 19: Stephanie Pierce
Mar 20: Vesta Kowalski
Mar 21: Jane Batarseh
Mar 22: Konnie Dadmun
Mar 23: Joyce Vogel
Mar 24: Wayne Blizzard
Mar 25: Wanda Porrata
Mar 26: Stacey Klamann
Mar 27: Robert Heylman
Mar 28: Jeff Martinhawk
Mar 29: Dean Hall
Mar 30: Brad Lovelace
Mar 31: Bill Eadie
Apr 1: Blair Shamel
Apr 2: Bruce Tindall
Apr 3: Christian Gillette
Apr 4: Penny Bridges

Edited by:

David Spencer & Calvin Johnson

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 17 – April 3

HOLY WEEK



Palm Sunday, March 28

8am Via Zoom | 10:30am Prerecorded | 1pm En Español | 5pm Meditation

We mark Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which was followed by his arrest and crucifixion.



Tenebrae, March 30, 7 pm

In this rebroadcast of a prior year's service we meditate on the events in Jesus's life between the Last Supper and the Resurrection. This quiet, candlelit service of light and shadows is punctuated by haunting music and the sound of the "earthquake" at Christ's tomb.



Maundy Thursday (bilingual/español), April 1, 7 pm

We mark the day Jesus hosted the Last Supper and washed his disciples' feet. This service will be primarily a rebroadcast of a prior year's service with a current homily by the Rev. Canon Anthony Guillen.



Good Friday, April 2, 12 pm

We remember Jesus's crucifixion and death on the cross with the Dean reading Stations of the Cross set to images of the stations in the cathedral nave. The Passion according to John, rebroadcast from a prior year, is included.



The Great Vigil of Easter, April 3, 7:30 pm

Our Bishop presides at this unique service, which begins with the lighting of the new fire and a retelling of the story of redemption. The Bishop will baptize and confirm (in an outdoor, socially distanced setting); she will proclaim Easter, and the service will continue with a rebroadcast of a prior year.



Sunday of The Resurrection, Easter Day, April 4

8am Via Zoom | 10:30am Prerecorded | 1pm (Español, Via Zoom)

We celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Bishop will preach.



Stations of the Cross

A video of Stations of the Cross is available on the below page.

Details for all of the above: stpaulcathedral.org/lent-2021