

# LENT

## REFLECTION BOOKLET



MARCH 2 - APRIL 17, 2022



ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL  
EPISCOPAL

*Love Christ • Serve Others • Welcome All*

## **March 2 - Ash Wednesday**

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Amos 5: 6-15; Psalm 32; Hebrews 12:1-14; Luke 18:9-14.

*...steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.*

I try so hard to follow the rules, but I keep comparing myself to others who seem to be more fortunate. At times it seems pointless to try, I have no energy to go on.

Then I remember that I can talk through all my wrong-doings and worries with the Lord.

He listens to my woes, and surrounds me with all-embracing love. He has given me clear guidelines for living a useful life – to be honest about my failings, be kind to others, and keep it simple.

And I look at myself and at all the blessings of my life, and I thank God that He shows me such unconditional and forgiving love.

## March 3

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Psalm 37:1-18, Habakkuk 3:1-18, Philippians 3:12-21, John 17:1-8

It is often difficult to see the hand of God in a turbulent world. We are living through a time marked by COVID, poor stewardship of our planet's resources, deepening political upheaval, and many other disturbances.

The prophet Habakkuk offers us a compelling lesson in his response to the turbulence of his time. Habakkuk is disillusioned with the evil that thrives in his nation, Judah. He is bewildered why God doesn't act to bring about justice. Like Habakkuk, we have all seen signs of evil in our lives. We have all been touched by disillusionment about the state of our nation and the world. Sometimes, it might even seem as if God is inactive and removed from all of creation.

Habakkuk had a revelation that God will send the Babylonians to punish Judah for their sins. The prophet expresses shock at this and questions whether God truly loves Judah. God responds that in time the Babylonians will also be judged, and more harshly than Judah. In the face of impending destruction, Habakkuk could have run from God. Instead, he expressed his ultimate faith in God, even though he did not fully understand God's plan:

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord... [he] is my strength...he enables me to tread on the heights.” (Hab 3:17-19)

Dialogue with God gave Habakkuk the strength to move from feelings of bewilderment and despair to the heights of joy. Today, some 2500 years later, as we enter into Lent, the book of Habakkuk reminds us that no place is too dark or remote for God's grace to penetrate in a powerful and life-affirming way. If we place our ultimate faith in God, rejoice, and feel gratitude, perhaps we, too, will be carried all the way up to the heights.

## March 4

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Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32; Psalm 31; 2 Philippians 4:1-9; John 17:9-19

Repent and rejoice! At the same time? While these two activities may seem like an odd couple, today's readings suggest that repentance—turning from the path that leads us away from God to the path that leads us toward God—also puts us on the path that leads to joy.

Ezekiel, writing to the Israelites in exile who felt God had abandoned them because of their sins, turns the traditional theology upside down by claiming an old proverb is no longer true. No longer must individuals bear the punishment for the failure of the people at large. From now on, we are all responsible for our own individual relationships to God. What good news in a world gone mad, in a world where we feel out of control!

Philosophers and psychologists both tell us that taking control of our own lives is a major step toward lasting happiness, or contentment, or, in today's word, joy. And one way to do that is to repent—to turn our lives away from the things that cause us harm to the things that are beneficial, the things that help us live the rich, full lives God created us to live.

What are those things? Paul, writing to a young Christian community that was being persecuted for their faith, gives us some ideas. Rejoice, he says, with the joy of a strong relationship with God that comes from focusing on the positive—on what is pure, honorable, commendable, just, true—even in a negative world. Those are the things lead to joy.

And Jesus, praying for his disciples on the eve of his death, makes the point that their joy will be full because they have heard his word and understand that they are no longer trapped by this evil world, but have the power and the knowledge to turn away from it and toward God.

And so do we. In this troubled world, at a time when so much feels beyond our control, perhaps now, as Lent begins, we might choose one tiny thing that we can change—one small part of our lives that we would like to turn around to go in a more positive direction—and practice moving in that new direction. It is always possible that a new habit experimented with during Lent will become a life-changing practice that leads to lasting joy!

*St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – March 2 - April 17*

## March 5

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Ezekiel 39:21-29; Psalm 30; Philippians 4:10-20; John 17:20-26

“I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up,  
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

<sup>2</sup>O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,  
and you have healed me.” Psalm 30 v. 1-2.

Last summer I connected with an old high school friend over **Facebook**. I had not seen her in nearly 50 years. I soon noticed Patti was an anti-vaxxer, posting a lot of misinformation about COVID. As a medical scientist, I sent a note trying to convince her that the science is real, vaccines and masks work... You know the drill. Then, around Thanksgiving I notice Patti was posting about her husband John being in the hospital, with all the terrible symptoms of COVID-19. John was in the ICU, on a ventilator. Later he was put into a drug-induced coma and given a tracheotomy. It got worse from there. Patti implored all her Facebook friends to pray for John.

My first impulse was to contact Patti and ask how she could live with herself, asking for God’s intervention in something created by their decisions. How dare they use up the critical health care resources when his condition could have been avoided? John has now been in the hospital for over 5 months.

Patti has prayed. I have prayed. I am sure many others have prayed as well. We “cried for help”. We have not rejoiced over his pain. John is finally getting better. He is off a ventilator. He is communicating with doctors, with Patti and his family. He will have “long COVID” and be in therapy for a long time, but God will be with him. God will heal him.

Will God heal others in the same situation? Will God heal the hardness in the hearts of those of us who have seen the great waste of humanity caused by the denial of this disease and its prevention by vaccinations? We cannot let ourselves fall into the trap of blaming those who were misled. God certainly will not. With God’s help they and their loved ones may be healed.

## March 6

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Daniel 9:3-10; Psalm 63:1-98; Hebrews 2:10-18; John 12:44-50

The reading in Daniel is not the only biblical cry for atonement through fasting with sackcloth and ashes. Ashes remind us that we are made of earth which God created, and to which we shall return. How fitting it is, then, this circular connection to Whom we belong.

We also seek God's forgiveness by confessing of our wrongs, praising God's goodness, and honestly intending to follow the way of light. As we bless God "as long as we live" and "proclaim [God's] name to my brothers and sisters," don't we bless all that our Creator loves and has brought to life?

Do we too love the goodness we experience in Creation? Do we show that love by acting in solidarity with God's Creation? By speaking out against the desecration of this holy ground, our common home, in the extraction of fossil fuels? By standing up for climate refugees who must find other lands when their homes are washed away in rising waters or uninhabitable because of desertification or unaffordable due to dwindling resources; for our vulnerable neighbors who experience poor health in communities overtaken by air or water pollution; for all manner of creation in our deserts, mountains, plains, and waterways that cannot speak for itself?

Let us find our way out of the darkness. Let us look for the light in the love that God so freely invites us to share. Each day of Lent let us intentionally and creatively discover ways to follow the Light of love, the beloved son of God and brother of us all. Together let us be God's healing community, the hands and feet and heart of Christ.

## March 7

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Genesis 37:1-11; Psalm 41; 1 Corinthians 1:1-19; Mark 1:1-13

“I’m right and you’re wrong.” “I’m more deserving than you are.” My beliefs are right and yours are wrong.” “My religion is the only real one.” “The pews are better than chairs.” “The old hymnals are better than any new ones.” “You’re wrong if you’re not wearing a mask.” Sound familiar? Can you relate? And so it has gone on for centuries and centuries.

Look at today’s readings. In Genesis, Joseph’s brothers are jealous of how he is loved by all and feel they are more deserving. The Corinthians quarrel over who they should follow, Paul or Jesus. And finally in Mark, there were arguments about who they should be baptized by, John the Baptist or Jesus.

As we continue the readings we learn that Joseph ended up saving not only his family from a famine, but all of Israel. And Paul never wanted people to follow him but preached the word of Jesus. Finally John tells his followers that he baptized them with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Why do we find it necessary to always be right, always be the winner? Are we too quick to want our opinion heard? Perhaps in this Lenten season we can all try listening and learning more from each other. Replace your contradictory ideas with love and compassion. Let’s find something we have in common. We can even try walking in each others moccasins.

When I was preparing this meditation I saw I had underlined a portion that might help remind us to be patient and humble when we face conflict:

“...the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and knowledge—even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

## March 8

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Genesis 37:12-24; Psalm 45; 1 Corinthians 1:20-31; Mark 1:14-28

At this time of the Christian year, the question always comes up again in my mind: Is there some way I can reclaim this language of repentance without thinking of myself as a lowly worm in God's bright apple of creation? I understand the need for humility as a part of honest reconciliation, but it seems to me the language used is aimed more at debasing the human learning curve (and worse, debasing the human doing the learning) than at creating a clean, clear environment for returning to our faith practice from a place of deeper vulnerability and greater faith in God's ability to heal us.

Thinking of repentance as a simplifying practice to remove all the built-up clutter and debris of natural human imperfections seems much more productive and meaningful way to consider it. Confession – if needed – and the hard inner work of reconciling our human short-sightedness with our human soul's understanding of who we are to God can result in a wholesome, healthy simplification of our approach to daily living.

Changing our way of thinking about and referring to repentance can also minimize our resistance to it. This reimagining makes discipleship seem less like a routine task we have done for years and so must continue to do. Rather, it brings our discipleship truly alive in our hearts, and removes the obstacles to our becoming 'fishers of people' everywhere we go and in everything we do.

John the Baptizer readied the Jews for the good news of the Messiah by preaching to them repentance and washing off the old manner of being, literally and metaphorically. We as Christians have received baptism as a sacrament that calls us to live in community and share the good news with others. Remember – the news is good! We might get it wrong sometimes. It may be difficult to accept at other times, but its comfort is real and the joy that is the result of a simple heart and a clear mind are just as real.



## March 9

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Genesis 37:25-36; Psalm 119:49-72; 1 Corinthians 2:1-13; Mark 1:29-45

When I read the assigned lessons, 1 Corinthians grabbed me, particularly verse 2:11: *For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the spirit of God.*

I often need to be reminded that only God truly knows God's plans and assessments. My mind is pretty sure it knows who's who, but this verse tells me to hold my horses (and my tongue). If we are attuned to the spirit, God may grant glimpses, but we are not able to grasp the full picture.

The verse also led me to a tangent—the flipside. God knows what's in our hearts, but does that necessarily mean God knows the experience of our emotions?

This thought path passed a theologian who posited that Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman (to whom Jesus was not actually nice at first) taught him that his ministry and love went beyond his tribe.

The path also crossed Matthew Fox's idea that we are meant to be co-creators with God.

Besides Jesus teaching us about God, did God send him to learn what the human spirit is like from the inside? I wondered if following this idea would lead to heresy, but I took another step.

Since God sees whole arcs, did God need to learn what it's like to only be able to see little parts of history, the work for justice, relationships, etc? Did God need to go beyond identifying our feelings of joy or fear and to actually experience the laughter of a child or feeling afraid?

I arrived at a place of awe—we have a God who goes beyond messages of, “Hey, don't be afraid.” We have a God who is willing to experience our worst nightmares even unto to being forsaken by God.

## March 10

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Genesis 39:1-23; Psalm 50; 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:15 Mark 2:1-12

Mark tells us about a group of men who brought a paralyzed man to Jesus. There was such a crowd gathered around the home that the men could not get in to see Jesus. So, they *dug through the roof* and lowered the paralyzed man down to Jesus. Jesus saw the faith of these people and immediately forgave the paralyzed man his sins.

Our faith is not always easy, is it? Sometimes, we may feel that God is too far from us; that too many people are in between us and God; that the house is full. So, maybe we, too, feel like we must dig through the roof in order to reach God; to bypass all the people blocking our path. Sometimes, we feel as though we must take some extra steps to gain the love and forgiveness of our Savior.

It's ok to feel, at times, that God is out of our reach. By “digging through the roof,” we are clinging to our faith in hopes of reaching God for the help we need. If God felt *always* accessible, why would we need our faith? There are other Gospel stories where Jesus recognized the faith of those who chased after him. Even the woman who was only able to touch the hem of Jesus' clothing was recognized!

When we feel like our path to Jesus is blocked, giving up is not an option and we don't always need to “wait in line!” Sometimes, we must “dig through the roof” and lower our own paralyzed souls down to Jesus so that we may be forgiven and healed. Jesus will feel our faith and give us what we need.

Lent is a time of reflection, of penitence, and of spiritual healing. If you need to, take those extra steps to bring yourself closer to God. Jesus is waiting for us; Jesus is here with us.

## March 11

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Genesis 40:1-23; Psalm 40; 1 Corinthians 3:16-23; Mark 2:13-22

The passage from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth reminds us of who we truly are.

“You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God himself is present in you? No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple, you can be sure of that. God's temple is sacred – and you, remember, *are* the temple.” (v. 16 - 17, as translated in *The Message*.)

If we think of ourselves as being the temple of God, what does that really mean, as we move through our lives? What are the implications for our own spiritual growth and maturity, as well as for our relationships with our family and our neighbors?

We live at a time when there are forces that seek to minimize our common humanity, desecrating the temple by attempting to diminish and devalue the worth of some among us. The passage in Corinthians reminds us that we need to guard ourselves and others against this kind of threat. Lent reminds us of our collective need for grace and just how much God values every one of us.

## March 12

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Genesis 41:1-13; Psalm 55; 1 Corinthians 4:1-7, Mark 2:23-3:6

I recall that in the film M\*A\*S\*H, one of the heroes is the company clerk, who was always able to know when the helicopters carrying wounded would be coming before they could actually be heard. As I was a company clerk, I took pride in being able to anticipate what was going to happen so that members of my unit could respond to it.

The passages for today use responding to everyday events as a theme. We don't necessarily have to rely on someone to interpret our dreams in order to respond. We have rules that anticipate what a response should be, and we use those to make our lives more predictable and easier to manage.

Sometimes, the rules become too restrictive, as Jesus pointed out in Mark's gospel. Jesus found the rules imposed by the Pharisees to be extreme in how they interpreted the scriptures. He healed a man with a withered hand in today's gospel lesson and asked whether doing good on the Sabbath was a crime. The Pharisees had no answer for him and withdrew to plot against him.

Ideally, we can trust in God and put one foot in front of the other on a daily basis. We can also take our concerns to God in prayer and ask for God's guidance in dealing with what troubles us. Sometimes that guidance comes quickly, sometimes slowly. Sometimes, it comes in ways we don't expect, such as dreams. Sometimes, it comes from gifted people, like the M\*A\*S\*H company clerk.

As Corinthians tells us, let us celebrate the gifts we have been given and use them to help others as God has helped us.

## March 13

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Genesis 41:14-45; Psalm 24; Romans 6:3-14; John 5:19-24

“Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD strong and mighty,  
The LORD mighty in battle.” -Psalm 24:8

“For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.” -John 5:20

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” -Romans 6:4

“And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it: and I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” -Genesis 41:15

In today’s scriptures, we hear of God through vastly different lenses. In the Psalm God, the King of glory is “the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.” In John, we hear that the Father loves the Son. In Romans, Christ is raised from the dead through the glory of the Father. In Genesis God’s plan is revealed through Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream.

God is always present and unchanging, but as humans we hear God according to our time and place. A Lord strong and mighty in battle must have resonated in a time of Kings. The father and son relationship described in John is timeless. Joseph’s interpretation of the Pharaoh’s dream was practical and timely.

Perhaps God is like a proverbial tree falling in the woods. Only a vibration is present unless we make ourselves available to hear. When we listen, God will speak to us in ways that have relevance to us when we need it.

## March 14

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Genesis 41:46-57; Psalm 56; 1 Corinthians 4:8-20(21); Mark 3:7-19a

Have you ever felt persecuted for something you haven't done? Often in life it is quite human to jump to conclusions without questioning and learning the facts first. Because of this, a lot of anxiety can arise in the accuser and unnecessary grief and worry from the accused.

Many times, in my life I have been reminded not to *react*, but to *respond* to a situation which could potentially blow up into confusion, chaos, and blaming one another for something that may have been a simple misunderstanding. But what happens when the other party does not wish to follow this simple premise? I can create a lot of strife.

Psalm 56 reminds me that if you put some trust in God, the flesh cannot hurt me:

Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample on me;  
all day long foes oppress me;  
my enemies trample on me all day long,  
for many fight against me.  
O Most High, when I am afraid,  
I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise,  
in God I trust; I am not afraid;  
what can flesh do to me?

Time can heal wounds if you just keep the faith and know that if you've done nothing wrong:

Then my enemies will retreat  
in the day when I call.  
This I know that God is for me.

There may be times when it is difficult to understand why bad things happen to good people, but it can be quite healing to turn these difficult times over to a higher power to help us get through them as Christ did to his Father during his crucifixion.

## March 15

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Genesis 42:1-17; Psalm 61; 1 Corinthians 5:1-8; Mark 3:19b-35

The Gospel story for today is early in Jesus' ministry. He had already been baptized, went into the wilderness for 40 days, returned to preach and teach and heal. He called several people to be his closest disciples. Now he was back home for the first time and his family heard some people saying, "He has gone out of his mind." Who were these people? What was their motive in saying Jesus had gone mad? Sometimes I fall into the trap of believing that those who don't agree with me are not in full possession of their good senses. The religious authorities were also upset with Jesus. They said, "He has Beelzebul (Satan) and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." What prompted the authorities to make this accusation? Sometimes when I feel I am losing control of a situation, I try to put down "the other" to protect my perceived superiority. But this is all just a set up for what is to follow.

In the midst of this commotion, Jesus gathers the people around him and talks with them, reasons with them, ponders with them about the ways of the world. Can Satan cast out Satan? Can a divided kingdom remain a kingdom? Can you plunder a powerful person's property without subduing them? Of course not. It doesn't make any sense. It is all an exaggeration. Jesus diffuses this impassioned situation by inviting people into a relationship with him, so that together they might imagine a world where harmony, unity and compassion are the norm - to imagine a world where people strive to do God's will.

What is Jesus calling us to imagine right now? What is God's will for us? Who/what are we being called to build up? How can we do so in a unified way? What influence do we have, individually and as a beloved community, that we can use to benefit all of our sisters and brothers?

May this season of Lent provide us with time and space to ponder these things.

## March 16

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Genesis 42: 18-28; Psalm 72; 1Corinthians 5:9-6:8; Mark 4: 1-20

The reflection is on the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is explaining about the parables to his disciples. He tells them that they are given the secret of the kingdom of God but everyone else will be given parables.

How do you hear the parables when they are read to you in church or when you read them yourself?

The famous parable about the seeds and the Sower may describe what happens to you. When the seeds are sown on the path, they do not take root. It is said that Satan comes and takes away the word, the seed. Could that happen to you? You are distracted by a text message that comes on your iPhone when you are following the service bulletin on the phone.

The Sower may spread seeds on rocky soil, and they cannot root. You receive the words, seeds with joy and then Monday comes after your heard them on Sunday, you get distracted and forget them. No deep roots.

The seeds sown among thorns. The seeds start to grow, and the thorns and brambles choke the plants so there isn't any grain produced. Another failure. Does this happen when there are too many conflicts in your life? You are trying to heed the words and follow but cannot bring them to be your own.

Then the seeds are sown on good soil, they mature and increase many folds. Let us hope this is how you can receive the seeds, word, and that you can mature and spread the seeds, the word of God using parables, actions or the methods that are best for you.

I do hope the seeds are sown on good soil for you this Lent.



## March 17

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Genesis 42:29-38, Psalm 71, 2 Corinthians 6:12-20, Mark 4:21-34

In today's reading of the gospel verse 23 reminds me of the words of a prophet of my generation, coincidentally named Paul, who once said "A man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest." In the previous verse we are encouraged to put our light on a lampstand and not hide it under a bed or basket. We are just to do the shining where the light goes and where it lands is above our paid grade. We do not have to worry about running out of light for, "by your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides." He who oversees handing out light has an infinite supply.

Jesus then goes on and switches metaphors to the scattering of seeds, again we scatter the seeds, whether its accepted or rejected is above our paid grade. In these divisive times, not they are any more divisive than in Jesus's day. There was a group that was following him because they believed in Him and a group that wanted to kill Him and yet they all followed Him. In these divisive times "who we are" is out there for all the world to see, it is the light and the seed we are told to spread. Jesus continues with that metaphor saying that "the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed." From a tiny little seed, a kingdom is produced and not just any old Kingdom, those are a dime a dozen and come and go all the time, it is the Kingdom of God, and it is forever.

## March 18

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Genesis 43:1–15; Psalm 69:1–38; 1 Corinthians 7:1–9; Mark 4:35–41

A family torn apart by jealousy and violence is struggling to find enough to eat. A culture is tainted by harmful sexual behavior. A group of men hit by a powerful storm are fearing for their lives. The situations in today's lessons remind us of the harshness of life that we also experience today. The cry of the Psalmist, "Save me, O God, for the waters have risen up to my neck," reminds me of times when I less eloquently prayed, "God, I just don't see how things are going to get better."

Yet, as the readings unfold, God's care for his people is revealed. The sons of Israel, seeking relief from famine in Egypt, miraculously encounter their estranged brother Joseph, who is overseeing food production for the Pharaoh. Through their journey, their hunger is alleviated, and eventually their broken relationships are restored as well. Paul helps the Corinthians to understand how God provides partners to meet relational needs for some and the gift of self-control, and peace, to others. And Jesus literally calms the wind and the waves. These scriptures remind us that God can be trusted with our pain and our fear.

Most of us do not routinely experience interventions quite as dramatically as the disciples in the boat; often we do not feel God responding when we think we need it. I believe we can look again to the words of the Psalm for guidance on connecting with God in times of need. "I will praise the Name of God in song; I will proclaim his greatness with thanksgiving." When I express gratitude for times God has helped me through difficult circumstances—sometimes in big ways, like a family member's recovery from a debilitating addiction, and sometimes in small ways, like when a friend shows up to lift my spirits—my faith in the providence of God is renewed.

## March 19

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Genesis 43: 16-34; Psalm 75; 1 Corinthians 7 10-24; Mark 5: 1-20

The Psalms are the hymns and praises that the Hebrews used to worship God. In this hymn of both praise and thanksgiving, the psalmist gives thanks for a previous blessing and gives warning to others to repent. Judgement comes suddenly at the time when the Creator brings down one person and lifts up another.

I am always grateful for a helpful warning. In this case hubris is what appears to be punished. Confidence is necessary in order to move forward, especially with difficult challenges or in new directions. Overconfidence, exaggerated pride toward, or defiance of, legitimate authority, usually leads to downfall.

As a faith community we are blessed with companions with whom to season our leadings. They nurture our strengths and support our shortcomings. They can help us to stay on our path and persevere, even when we are moving toward "good trouble.". Thank you my Creator for your guidance, patience, and mercy as I travel on my journey.

## March 20

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Genesis 44:1-17; Psalm 93; Romans 8:1-10; John 5:25-29

What is it we as Christians say a multitude of times during any given year? “I will, with God’s help.” We were meant to live our lives in community. The God I believe in not only surrounds us with unconditional love but flows within us with that same love.

I used to take that statement as meaning that I had to reach out and ask for God’s help. I look at it a little differently now. God is always helping each and every one of us—all creation. The Holy Spirit guides me with the words in books I read, God’s gentle sigh brushes by my body as I step forward, my neighbor waves to me asking how my day is going, the man on the corner smiles at me saying ‘God bless you dear’, my heart fills with joy when my pups remind me of how much I am loved... So now I search for the many unimaginable ways God finds to help me because I know God is already at work, right now. “...holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.” Psalm 93:5

I consciously take moments throughout my day to open my human senses, heart and imagination to witness where God is helping me at that moment or was there, but I did not recognize it at the time. We are all beloved children of God. He knows we are of flesh and She will never ever give up on us. “*For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh...*” (Romans 8:3). Sometimes I even ask God to ‘dumb it down’ a bit as I’m not wanting to understand what I am getting help to do.

How is God helping you on this glorious day?

Are you able to acknowledge the help?

Can you give thanks?

## March 21

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Genesis 44:18-34; Psalm 80; 1 Corinthians 7:25-31; Mark 5:21-43

“...Little girl, get up!” Mark 5:41

“...Your faith has made you well...” this is the phrase that keeps coming up for me in this current pandemic/post-pandemic era.

How has your faith made you well? Has it ever stopped your “hemorrhaging”?

For me, in ways, yes. I find examples of my faith making me well, especially where it has soothed me when I’ve had anxieties, it has nurtured me when I was broken, and it has lifted me when I was low. We may be tugging on Jesus’ cloak at times, but he’s happy to help us. Faith has led us to him.

How have you been awakened by the command of Jesus?

“Little girl, get up!” I’ve felt it when I’ve been at my lowest and spiritually asleep. I’ve felt it when I thought there wasn’t hope, or was not a way to repair something or endure something. I’ve gotten up and been fed by the community Jesus has brought me into. I’ve gotten up and have been restored to be able to feed others and help them arise.

“Do not fear, only believe.” This is a phrase I can say like a mantra, something I can say and do at the same time.

During this Lenten season, I try to reflect on those difficult times that I’ve gone through that turned out to be blessings. I am quicker to remember that often the worst thing that could happen can often be the best thing that happened.

Jesus has eyes all around watching us, helping us find him in the crowd, restoring us collectively and individually. He teaches us to have faith, commands us to not fear. He gives us the healing tools we need for ourselves to lean into our faith and heal our wounds with his love and power.

*St Paul’s Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – March 2 - April 17*

## March 22

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Genesis 45:1-15; Psalms 78:1-39; I Corinthians 7:32-40; Mark 6:1-13

Mark 6:11 speaks of rejection. When I first became a Christian at the age of 12, I was very excited about being a missionary or a Bible teacher someday. I was extremely insecure however, and quickly learned that women did not do such things in the denomination in which I was raised. Throughout the years, especially after coming out as a gay person I kept my relationship to God a secret as I was rejected from my church, and the LGBTQ community was not receptive to hearing about God's love especially during the AIDS epidemic of the 80's when many churches led the hate filled anti-gay campaigns.

When I realized that God was calling me back to California after a 20-year absence in 2011, I prayed that He would show me a way to be a light and a source of reconciliation to God in my LGBTQ Community. I wondered what people in the LGBTQ community would think, but The Lord spoke to my heart: "Don't worry, I am the One who called you, don't worry about what people think. If you do, you will worry all your life because there will always be people who will think something unkind about you."

In Mark 6:7-11, when Jesus sent His disciples out into the towns to preach, He told them what to do if people rejected them. He did not tell them to stand around and cry and be wounded, hurt, bleeding and embarrassed. He told them to "shake it off."

As we at St. Paul's Cathedral embark of the Year of Evangelism, and a program to reach out to our neighbors and share our stories of God's love, I would encourage you to take Jesus' advice and learn to shake off our troubles, problems, disappointments, and rejections. So, if there is a call on your life, and one person or group of people rejects you, there will be others who will accept you and find the joy of becoming a member of God's Kingdom of love and acceptance. Remember Jesus's words, "shake off the rejection and move-on!"

## March 23

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Genesis 45:16-28; Psalm 119: 97-120; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 6:13-29

Our Gospel reading today tells the unfortunate story of the death of John the Baptist.

“Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him (Mark 6:20)”.

Herod was also trying to impress his wife, Herodias, and her daughter. He made a promise that resulted in a tragedy. How could Herod have avoided this outcome? David gives us sage advice in his Psalm.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).”  
“The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts (Psalm 119:110).”

The reading in Genesis also relates what was a tragedy that turned into a blessing for God’s people. Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers. And yet, Pharaoh said to Joseph and his family to “Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours (Genesis 45:20).”

We may not be able to avoid all bad decisions, or bad outcomes in the short-term, but we can keep God’s precepts first and foremost in our hearts, and remember that “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1Corinthians 8:1b).”

We can take comfort in these words- “but anyone who loves God is known by him (1 Corinthians 8:3).

## March 24

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Genesis 46: 1-7, 28-34; Psalm 42; 1 Corinthians 9: 1-15; Mark 6: 30-46

The familiar loaves and fishes' story is a universal favorite. My nerdy self loves the way the Gospel narrative of the miraculous feeding evokes the Exodus story of God's providing the Israelites manna to sustain them, and Elisha's command to distribute the meager bread supply to satisfy the hungry people in 2 Kings is remarkably similar to how Jesus tells the apostles feed the crowds in Mark's Gospel. However, it is the prelude to this miraculous feeding of the people that speaks to me.

Jesus recognizes the disciples' exhaustion and, from a place of kindness and concern, tells them to take a break and rest to care for themselves in a quiet place, away from the crowds and the work they were engaged in. Taking time to rest and pray is something Jesus does throughout the Gospel narratives, as he does in this passage, too. He shows that rest, breaking routine, automatic thinking, and behavior, is essential to an open, compassionate life which clears room to let God inside.

Lent gives us the opportunity to clear time for rest and self-care so we can meet Jesus honestly and openly in prayer and meditation. The Lenten call to self-examination and repentance is not only a call to do charitable deeds and deprive ourselves, but a call to be good to ourselves, to others, and to all creation as we see God manifested in all. In our frenetic lives, going to a quiet place and shutting out the noise of the crowds (even those in our minds) is a radical idea. And the people in Mark's Gospel wouldn't have it; they figured out where Jesus and the disciples were going and headed them off. But, after feeding them, Jesus got back to his plan, sent the disciples away, and went to the mountain to pray, at least for a little while, till the next crisis and miracle.



## March 25

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Genesis 47:1-26; Psalm 88; 1 Corinthians 9:16-27; Mark 6:47-56

In the gospel reading, Jesus is creating this sense of wonder and awe in the miracles leading up to this specific reading. People were coming from all over to seek his healing. People were seeking him out. Jesus was creating this sense of readiness for people to risk following him and stepping away from what is familiar. Jesus was influencing people through this incredible sense of wonder and awe.

Paul also carries out this work as a preacher and what today we might consider a modern-day influencer. An influencer who seeks ways to appeal to a wider audience and continue to grow this audience. Paul asserts the importance of connecting with all people through his preaching. One of Paul's phrases "all things to all people" captures his drive to preach and be a bit of a chameleon to do this.

Sometimes we must step outside of our comfort zone to follow Jesus and to share our love for him and others beyond our church community in thought, word, and deed. Lent is a perfect time to be in wonder and awe of God's grace and how we lean in and share this love.

## March 26

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Genesis 47:27-48:7; Psalm 87; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Mark 7:1-23

After reviewing the readings several times, I felt drawn to the reading from 1 Corinthians – at least to part of it. It is a phrase I had heard many times before and I'm sure you have as well.

*God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing, he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*

First, I have to say thanks be to God that I haven't been tested like some people. Just read the newspaper or watch the 6 PM news. People dealing with tragedy, famine, war and more. Or, to bring it more local: homelessness, loss of a job or the end of a relationship. I've actually been very blessed.

But really, when you think about it, we are all tested. Maybe we don't think it approaches what some people have to deal with. But there are those instances when we pass a person begging on the street or a neighbor suffers the loss of a child. Perhaps we've witnessed a racist action or homophobic slur. These are times when we have a choice to make. How do we respond? This is also a test. It may not be a life-or-death decision but it can make a difference in the life of our sister or brother.

## March 27

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Genesis 48:8-22; Psalm 66; Romans 8:11-25; John 6:27-40

Line 5 of Psalm 66 stayed with me.

*“Come and see what God has done; he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.”*

What stayed with me was the wonder. How easy it is to muddle through life, going from task to task, obligation to obligation, our heads down, our shoulders tight. What are we not seeing, who are we missing?

When we lift our heads up, when we stop a for moment to see what surrounds us – the wonder of places and people - we get out of our heads and back into our hearts. The wonder calms us, connects us, and brings us closer to God and each other.

For me, wonder in the everyday leads to so much, but it requires practice. I stop my work to stand at my window, noticing the late afternoon light on the trees, the steady hum of traffic, a hawk circling overhead. What a gift to see these things, to be part of this world. When I am amazed, I am serene, creative, compassionate, patient, and loving.

Lent offers us an opportunity to let that wonder in, to still ourselves, to recalibrate.

After thinking about this Psalm for a few days, I Googled it, of course. And to my wonderful amazement I found that a version of the line above was the first telegraph sent from Washington D.C. to Baltimore by Samuel Morse on May 24, 1844.

“What hath God wrought,” Morse telegraphed from the Capitol to Alfred Vail at a train station in Baltimore. Moments later Vail answered: “What hath God wrought.”

Amazing!

Wishing you peace and wonder this Lenten season, my St. Paul’s friends.

## March 28

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Genesis 49:1-28; Psalm 89:1-18; 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1; Mark 7:24-37

*“Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. he said to her, ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’ But she answered him, ‘Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’ Then he said to her, ‘For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.’ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.” (Mark 7:26-30)*

In every sermon that I have heard preached on this text, the assumption is that Jesus learns something from this encounter with the Syrophenician woman, that he begins to expand the franchise beyond the chosen people to those outside the circle. This is remarkable for any number of reasons—that Jesus learns from a Gentile; that He learns from a woman, but I want to hone in on the simple idea that He *learns*; that, as His ministry progresses, His understanding of it deepens. Clearly this aspect of Jesus falls on the “fully human” side of His nature. The traditional understanding of Jesus is that He never sinned, He was without sin which is not the same as saying that He could not sin. In order for his life to have any ethical dimension at all, He must be able to sin and then resist it. However that may be, clearly in this story from Mark as we are interpreting it, He is at first mistaken. And the woman’s perseverance, her wit, and even deeper, her maternal love which in no essential way varies from the love that a Hebrew woman has for her child reveals to Jesus that He needs to rethink who is allowed into the Kingdom. Even though the parable of the Good Samaritan is in Luke, I like to think that it came later than this story and that it reveals a further evolution in Jesus’ thought that began here.

All of which is good news for us slow learners. If it takes time for Jesus to understand what His ministry is about—if Jesus also has a learning curve, then we can forgive ourselves and each other when we seem to be so slow in becoming better, more truly loving people.

## March 29

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Genesis 49:29-50:14; Psalm 97; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Mark 8:1-10

Mark's is the shortest of the four canonical gospels; he wrote in a direct style, almost abrupt at times, wasting no words in moving the narrative forward. Yet in 8:1-10 he recounts the miracle of the wilderness feeding of the four thousand, only two chapters after telling us, in chapter 6, of the very similar feeding of five thousand people. So, what's going on here? Why the apparent repetition?

Some scholars point to three things as the purpose of these narratives: Jesus as the new Moses, giving God's manna to his people; Jesus as savior not only of the Jews (the five thousand), but also of the Gentiles (the four thousand across the lake); Jesus foreshadowing the institution of the Eucharist. Other scholars' reason that the two stories so close together serve to highlight the obtuseness of the disciples to Jesus' true work.

But what about the existential meaning of this miracle, beyond the scholarly analysis of biblical criticism? How can this miracle story make a difference in the way we live our lives? Let's focus on how those hungry people who were amply fed by the stranger who had journeyed to their side of the lake might have reacted.

Astonishment was likely followed by gratitude: "Wow, I don't know how you did this, but thank you so much," were likely in the minds of those whom Jesus fed. "There was enough for all; there was plenty."

For me, this story centers on the abundance of God's gifts. God cares for us in ways that we don't always understand, ways that sometimes seem miraculous. In a spirit of thankfulness, it's our calling, in turn, to share the abundance God has given us with others.

## March 30

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Gen. 50:15-26; Psalm 101; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; Mark 8:11-26

Psalm 101 talks about how King David is going to govern his country by following God's motto, which is with "kind love and justice". Kind love is the love that God has for his people no matter what and justice means being fair. David loved the Lord and wanted his reign to be remembered by his integrity and encouraging godliness.

What would our world be like if our elected government administrations ran our country with the same motto? Not being a "Pollyanna," the outcome would be more tolerance, equity, fairness, equality, education and medical access for all, less racism, less being fearful, less lying, and more understanding and truth telling. This is how Jesus would like the world to be and for us to share his love, and live and be in community with each other.

I liked that King David promoted loving kindness to the oppressed and the poor; righteousness and honor in all those around him. Following the word of God in his own life, he did not tolerate nor want evildoers and wickedness in his kingdom. He feared they would lead others down the path of ungodliness. Why does God allow for evildoers and wicked people to exist at all?

The king made a promise that he would not act slowly on punishment on the people who were wicked. So "every morning" he judged people deciding if they were bad or not. I do not know the criteria of how he made that decision but if you ended up on the "bad" side, he destroyed you or found a way to silence you. This sounds a bit harsh, but I understand why, if the king did not take action or halt them, they could overthrow him and cause chaos and destruction by their evil ways in his kingdom.

Living life with integrity and having Jesus in your heart is the true reward! To stay the course, you must surround yourself with people who share the same values and desires; a community that walks with God!

*St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – March 2 - April 17*

## March 31

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Exodus 1:6-22; Psalm 69:1-38; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Mark 8:27-9: 1

Historian Michael Walzer reminds us that wherever God's people are, they're always in Egypt. They're always in the House of Bondage in some way, and trying to get to the Promised Land.

This is our situation: Whoever Pharaoh is, he's thinking more about keeping his power and protecting his own ego than he is about us and our welfare. So, what can we do?

Jesus advised us to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves.

Which is why I like these otherwise unheralded Hebrew midwives, Shiprah and Puah. To save their people and bear witness to the God of Israel, they slyly outwit Pharaoh and frustrate his plans. Was it their fault, they ask, if the Hebrew women were more vigorous and gave birth before the midwives could get there?

In this season of darkness waiting for light, where could you join with others to make your witness to the God who raised Jesus from the dead?

## April 1

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Exodus 2:1-22; Psalm 102; 1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3; Mark 9: 2-13

I notice a transition as each reading progresses, a transformation so to speak, (and literally, in the Mark passage). In Exodus, Moses begins as a Hebrew baby, becomes a child of Pharaoh's daughter, gets back to his Hebrew roots as he enters manhood and takes an action that takes him into the wilderness, yes, but also to a new life. The psalmist begins in despair and becomes more hopeful as he calls upon God. Corinthians talks about various gifts but in the end focuses on love. In Mark, the disciples' understandings are changed as Jesus is transfigured before their very eyes.

This Lent I am looking for transformation, too. Perhaps, like Moses, I will get in touch with my "child-of-God" roots in such a way as to take a new stand for justice. I hope my daily devotions will help me call upon God instead of being self-centered. Mostly, I trust that as I follow Jesus on this Lenten journey I will see him in a way that will strengthen me in ways of love.

A short vignette: A friend of ours has severe short-term memory loss. I have never felt very close to him. His wife, a dear friend, died 3 years ago. Because of my nursing background I have become the one to manage his medication regimen until permanent help can be obtained. Through daily contact and trying to work with him, I find myself feeling a lot closer to him. When his/my group of friends got together with him to propose outside help for him, we began by saying we loved and cared for him. I found I could honestly say that now. That was a transformative moment for me.



## April 2

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Exodus 2:23- 3:15; Psalm 107:33-43; I Corinthians 13:1-13; Mark 9:14-29

In today's scripture readings, I find the intersectionality of the spiritual principles of humility, faith, and love. In Exodus the Israelites are unaware that God has heard their calls of suffering and is moving to secure their freedom. Moses who is tending his flock, minding his own business, going about his life, gets called to a cause that will not only disrupt his life but is way beyond his own capacity. The psalmist tells of the ebb and flow of the gains and losses of the human condition and the ever-present love of a God who is in the changing circumstances of our lives. We round out the readings with Paul's letter to the Corinthians teaching them about love and the gospel story from Mark where Jesus saves the day after the disciples can't heal the demon possessed boy; a father who realizes that he so desperately wants to believe, because he wants his son to be healed, but knows that he needs help getting there.

How many times have I been like the Israelites, crying in my suffering, needing the relief only God's love can bring?

How many times in my life has God called me, like Moses, to interrupt my life to bring God's love and freedom to others?

How many times in my life do I forget that all the good in my life comes from God and it takes the loss of something to bring the humility that I need?

How many times in my life have I needed a miracle and lacked faith?

How many times in my life have I had knowledge and words but lacked love?

How is God working in my life in ways that I am unaware that are to be made known later?

In this Lenten season, let me be wise and heed these things, and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord.

## **April 3**

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Exodus 3:16-4:12; Psalm 118; Romans 12:1-21; John 8:46-59

### TRANSFORMATION

Hold fast to what is good

Be patient in suffering

Live in harmony with one another

Do not pay anyone evil for evil

SO

With love in my heart and willingness of mind, I head out into the world and all is well, that is, until some unkindness comes my way and I retaliate with unkind words.

So much for a new life

First comes the humiliation of failure

Then comes the comes the relief of humility, the grace of God and the forgiveness of others.

## April 4

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Exodus 4:10-20 (21-26) 27-31; Psalm 31; 1 Corinthians 14:1-19; Mark 9:30-41

The child that Jesus embraced among the disciples perfectly represents *who* we ought to welcome and *how*. In Jesus' time, children were relegated to the margins of social life. Children's social status was somewhere between women and enslaved people; children were regarded as no more than a mouth to feed and, unlike women or enslaved people, could not offer labor or payment in return. Today, we don't often consider children as an oppressed social group, but they are. Children are an inherently vulnerable and exploitable population, no matter their inherited privilege. Children are the largest demographic of impoverished people in the United States, which is one of the only nations that has not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which establishes children as people (not property) with rights to proper education, safety, and even play. When we welcome children, it is often contingent upon children modifying their natural inclinations to wiggle, cry, and roam so that the adults around them may remain comfortable in their presence. In a way, I feel like Jesus is pushing back against "respectability politics," which is when the worthiness of a marginalized group is determined by the dominant group based on their values and standards of behavior. As such, I feel challenged by Jesus to consider the following:

- Have I excluded others who could not repay my hospitality or make it "worth my while" in some way? Have I based one's worth too much on what they do or what they have to offer, rather than the fact they are a child of God? How have I measured who is worthy of care, and who isn't?
- Have I ever expected someone to edit themselves and their lived experiences for my own comfort? What would it look like to receive everyone, just as God made them?

My prayer is that an honest exploration of these questions will empower us to truly live into our mission to "Love Christ, serve others, and welcome all," no matter what.

*St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – March 2 - April 17*

## April 5

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Exodus 5:1-6:1; Psalm 121; 1 Corinthians 14:20-33a, 39-40; Mark 9:42-50

Psalm 121:8: “The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore”

Just the fact that at random I was assigned this reading further confirms my constant belief that God is with me at all times, sometimes actively treading in my life, sometimes being quiet but always present no matter what. I often tell people that I don't believe in coincidence. I believe God is there always, sometimes causing things to happen, sometimes through very long and circuitous paths, often including others who are regulars in my life, and sometimes people that enter in briefly but have a profound impact.

Like the time I was enroute to Nebraska by way of Denver to a tragic event with my father. I had just completed the Stephen ministry training and was supposed to be commissioned that Sunday morning, but instead I was on an airplane. Boarding late, a lady moved over to the middle seat next to her husband so I could sit on the aisle. They were very kind and pleasant and as was normal for me and clearly normal for her, we commenced a conversation, including that SHE was a Stephen minister. Over the next two hours she ministered to me with tears and incredible empathy and caring, to help prepare me to deal with what I would find when I arrived home.

Perhaps in my life this was the most profound and immediate way that God let me know He was watching over me.

Some might read the parts of this psalm and say, “Wait a minute, bad things do happen, God does not “keep you from all harm”. On Valentine's Day as I write this, a friend has just sent me this from James: “When our focus is on God, we can see things as they really are. Trials and hardships become the occasion for joy because they purify our faith, develop our character, and help us cultivate perseverance. . . we recognize the good things in our lives and respond with gratitude instead of doubt and suspicion.”

Think of the things that you've considered coincidences in your life- and consider were they (are they) God with you? Amen

## April 6

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Psalms 119:145-176; Exodus 7:8-24; 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

What are we to learn from the prayers and lamentations of the psalmist whose conversation before God moves from self-incrimination to boasting of being in God's presence? There is a kind of melancholy hopefulness that what he says might be accurate for him, but he prays for reassurance of that accuracy, for answers to his long prayer.

Moses and Aaron follow God's directions about performing feats of magic before Pharaoh by turning wooden staves into snakes (the Egyptian magicians do the same thing) and then by striking the Nile with the same staves and turning the water into blood (the Egyptian magicians do the same thing).

Paul reminds the Corinthians that we are higher minded than either the Psalmist or Moses and Aaron, that our assurance of belonging to Christ does not need magic tricks, miracles or signs. What we have is an inner assurance as Paul reminds the Corinthians: "But thanks be to God, we in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him." There is no doubt here, no tricks.

Notice that the Psalmist and Moses and Aaron are working independently of God, the one appealing for directions, and the other two carrying out orders. That whole business of God's being "there" and our being "here", separate from the God of love and his Christ is gone. The Holy Spirit dwells in us if we but ask and leads us triumphant through life and beyond. Christ invites us into God's nature and bids us be "persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence."

## April 7

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Exodus 7:25-8:19; Psalm 131; 2 Corinthians 3:7-18; Mark 10:17-31

Today's readings describe an interesting and somewhat difficult arc. I sometimes see myself in Pharaoh, who refuses to listen to, much less subject himself to the Lord. He finally gets afraid and/or concerned, reaches out for succor, and upon receiving a respite (by way of Grace), he goes right back to hardness of heart and not following God's way. This is not only tedious, but a dangerous cycle. And yet...

In Corinthians we hear of a similar hardness of *mind*, or lack of understanding, and, "only in Christ is it set aside." When the people hear the history and the lessons of faith, they "glaze over," tune out, misunderstand. Only in and through Christ and the Spirit of the Lord is there the beginning of understanding of what it is to become transformed people of God—transformed into the image of Christ.

Mark's gospel seems to throw cold water on all of this, as he asserts that those of us who have possessions and comfort could not possibly enter the kingdom of God. But then the narrative gives us the most astounding gift of all—even though we cannot possibly conceive of it, "for God all things are possible."

How amazing and simple is that?!

While the "first will be last and the last will be first," I did not hear that anyone is left *out!* This radical inclusion theology is ours to claim. And in the meanwhile: "Oh, Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore."

## April 8

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Exodus 9:13-35; Psalm 22; 2 Corinthians 4:1-12; Mark 10:32-45

How would you feel if you knew the future? Today's lessons bear witness to the prophecies of the future with warnings, hope, and assurance.

In today's Exodus lesson, Moses paid Pharaoh an early morning visit, demanding that the People of Israel be released from bondage in Egypt or pestilence, famine, hail and fire would come down. It did.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes that we "carry in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies." For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus's sake. We do if we believe!

Mark leaves "the future to those for whom it has been prepared." Mark 10:45 states, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Lent is our time of waiting and to walk and serve in the footsteps of Christ. We are preparing for death and waiting for new life. May the blessing of God's promise for Holy Week guide you on your path in Christ.

## April 9

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Exodus 10:21-11:8; Psalm 137:1-9; 2 Corinthians 4:13-18; Mark 10:46-5

“Yes, everything is for your sake ...” 2 Cor. 4:15.

This phrase leapt out at me as I read this passage, and it would not let me loose. As Lent is a time when we focus on our need to keep our attention on Jesus; when we need to pay attention to our “falling short” or our brokenness; and when we are specifically called to meet the needs of those in poverty; I was surprised by this reminder – IT is all for us.

IT is God’s project of ongoing creation, continuous quality control (repentance), and renewal (reconciliation) is all for US. This is the economy of Grace, and it’s purpose is that WE might be brought – with Jesus – more fully into God’s presence.

There is much that could be said, and other verses that could be quoted (John 3:16), but 2 Cor. 4:15 is a great shorthand for God’s purpose being overwhelmingly for you and me and all people – for us:

*Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*



## **April 10 – Palm Sunday**

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Zech. 9:9-12, Psalm 24, 29, 1 Tim. 6:12-16, Luke 19:41-48

Growing up, Palm Sunday always was a fun liturgy. We started outside of our church building, usually on a picturesque spring day, for northern Wisconsin anyway. I loved the parade element to it, the fact that we got extra objects to wave around in the palms. There were serious readings with multiple parts spoken out by the whole of the congregation. It was always the most distinct liturgy to my younger self, and of course meant that Easter would follow, and then we'd be close to the end of the school year!

But my geo-psyche, a term for the way land shapes your soul and understanding of the world, remembers it also as a time of melting ice in the wilderness, and rivulets forming over lakes, like rivers on a glacier. Even now I can smell the squishy mud as water made pools and streams that only exist in spring. Pushing the family car up the hill from the gate was a routine of muddy and messy spring, between my own shoes and the splattering from the wheels, one could look like they too were part of the mud quickly.

Sometimes, things would refreeze, and the muddled jumble of mud would become hard as the ice it was replacing, gritty and cold. The remelting of that would be a world of mess all its own. But don't messes and messy things allow us to see things in new ways, or reorient us entirely?

The readings for this reflection are all messy. Paul says to "fight the good fight" and Psalm 29 describes God's splendor coming through breaking trees, forests stripped bare, through fire and flood. Jesus cries over Jerusalem and makes things messy in the Temple. Maybe Palm Sunday is itself a jumbled mess that tells us to look at things differently than we have been. Do triumphant conquerors come astride donkeys? What do shouts of "Hosanna" mean to a man who knows he's going to certain death? Who do we welcome to the temple of our own hearts, and what expectations do we have of them?

May this Holy Week show us the beauty of life's messes, and may we find new reasons to shout "Hosanna" in our own time.

## April 11

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Lamentations 1:1-2,6-12; Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 1:1-7; Mark 11:12-25

Across the gulf of nearly three millennia, the first words of the Lamentations of Jeremiah capture our lives today: *How lonely sits the city, that was full of people!* Today's readings encapsulate how throughout the ages we have struggled with affliction, and to what extent we ourselves are responsible for it. David's Psalm pleads to his Lord for relief for his suffering, after (we are told in the notes) he imposed himself upon Bathsheba and sent her husband to his death; likewise, Jeremiah (who I picture as unbathed and with a massive beard full of fleas whose constant bites drive his furious rants) pivots from crying over Jerusalem to blaming her for her own downfall. It is Paul who shows compassion, telling the Corinthians that we drink alike from shared cups of affliction and comfort.

Meanwhile Mark's gospel relays the story of Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple, which in turn is bracketed by the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree. The corrupt moneychangers deserve Jesus' wrath, but the fig tree is out of season, so why does Jesus cause it to wither?

As a teacher I often deal with student crises, even more so during the pandemic: the terrible strain of isolation, economic woes and/or job stresses, chronic health issues, even sexual harassment. Did they *deserve* these afflictions? Or were they, like the fig tree, simply at the wrong place at the wrong time? Is the message that God is as fickle and random as a collection of molecules bouncing around without meaning or purpose, striking out in anger at both the wicked and the innocent?

Perhaps. Or perhaps the answer lies at the very end of the passage in Mark. Jesus tells the disciples of the power of faith and prayer, power which can move mountains, overturn the corrupt, and empty the cities of people—and wither innocent fig trees. We all are simultaneously afflicted and full of power, and we should use that power wisely in the shadow of our own suffering, to forgive others—and ourselves. Only then will the city be full of lively, laughing people once more.

## April 12

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Lamentations 1:17-22; Psalm 6; 2 Corinthians 1:8-22; Mark 11:27-33

“FOR IN HIM, EVERY ONE OF GOD’S PROMISES IS A “YES.” FOR THIS REASON, IT IS THROUGH HIM THAT WE SAY THE “AMEN,” TO THE GLORY OF GOD.”

Since the 11th century, Lent has been penitential and preparatory time. Preparation brings questions like, should I take on or give up this or that? As my grandson used to say when he was small, “Grandpa, what to do?”

What struck me about the readings is that there is a great deal of stress, suffering, and despair overall. In Lamentations, there is suffering, and Israel begs for mercy, and God is having none of it. The Psalmist believes that the suffering described is clear evidence that God is not happy with Israel. Church in Corinth expresses their unhappiness at Paul because of his perceived indecision. And in Mark, the priests and elders in Jerusalem are confounded because they cannot get Jesus to play their game.

I think many of us, over these past several years of division, conflict, and general uncertainty of our futures, might have asked questions like, “is God saying ‘no,’” or “where is God in all this?”

In Lent, our preparation is looking at ourselves, as did the author of Lamentations, the Psalmist, and Paul. There ought to be critical self-examination. Indeed, we should identify and turn away from those soul-damaging and destructive habits, such as thinking that God is not with us.

But I think there is a joy as well! We are God’s beloved! God says, “yes!” Jesus has walked to Jerusalem, and he will walk to the cross, and in doing so, he opens the doors of paradise to us. Through God’s grace, we are cleansed and purified by the blood of Christ, fully reconciled with our creator, savior, and one another. Our sin, blindness, and death are behind us. If this is not joy, what is? What to do? Say “yes” just like Jesus, and “Amen” just like Paul.

*St Paul’s Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – March 2 - April 17*

## April 13

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Lamentations 2:1-9, 14-17; Psalm 55; 2 Corinthians 1:23- 2:11; Mark 12:1-11

In the Old Testament, Israel was God's vineyard. The parable of the Wicked Tenants found in Mark's gospel is thought to be a first century Church interpretation of Jesus' prophecies about the Kingdom of God. The religious authorities of his time were opposed to what Jesus proclaimed and conspired with the Roman government to destroy him. Looking at the story we can interpret that God wishes us (as the new Israel) to be good stewards of all that God has lavishly bestowed upon us (the vineyard). God sent Jesus (the owner's son) to open our hearts to the glory of loving God and loving every human being on the planet as our brother and sister. But we don't always live up to our inheritance both personally, as a nation, or as the worldwide human community. Because we are afraid to trust Jesus and his unconditional love for us, we fall into the trap of avarice and hubris.

I am reminded of a portion of the General Confession in the service of Morning Prayer in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer: "...we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us..." I find these old words call me to come before the foot of the cross this Holy Week. Daily, I need to renew my trust in God and to follow Jesus in his call of the Kingdom of God, to bring justice and peace for all people. I will with God's help.

When I am weary and heavy burdened, Jesus comes to me in silence and sits down beside me, giving me strength to climb mountains and to walk on stormy seas. He raises me up to be a channel of his abundant love.

## April 14, Maundy Thursday

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Lamentations 2:10-18; Psalm 102; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32; Mark 14:12-25

On this Maundy Thursday we have come to the crux of the Jesus story, the fork in the road, the moment of truth. The doorway between the dusty world and the transcendent has been cracked open. What happens next will blow the hinges off completely.

Our scriptural readings for today pose a question: where shall we plant our seeds and grow our roots? In the world of impermanence, or in the immutable Ground of Being beyond all categories of understanding? Where shall we set the pillars of *our* being?

The stakes are high. Because of the merciless impermanence of the phenomenal world suffering is our lot—loss, loss, loss. All of the forms around us will melt like butter in the sun. And yet, shimmering just beneath the surface of our suffering is a depth that goes down and down and down beyond all naming, knowing, and grasping.

As Christians, the central metaphor of both Paul's and Mark's passages is a familiar one—bread as the Body of Christ. The image of bread—a simple, everyday pantry staple born of the marriage of broken-open wheat, living yeast, kneading hands, and the fire of the oven—is a vibrant reminder of the interconnectedness of all matter, energy, effort, and consciousness. And when we participate in the Eucharist that Mark's passage establishes, we participate mind, body, and soul in what Julian of Norwich simply called *oneing*. At the Table there is no more separation for we are one in the Body of Christ. The space between us and God has collapsed. In fact, it was never there at all, except in our own muddled thinking.

This great mystery lies at the heart of the Christian experience, as it lies at the heart of all the world's wisdom traditions—the paradox that we are both formed and formless, separate and joined, many and one. It is not the mind that will resolve this paradox—only through the lived experience of love does the fog of confusion begin to lift. These are truths less to be understood than to be lived. Sometimes the path is found only by walking.

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## **April 15, Good Friday**

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Lamentations 3:1-9,19-33, Psalm 22, 1 Peter 1:10-20, John 13:36-38

John 13:36-38

Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.” Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus does not give the answer which Peter had sought when he said to Peter: “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.” Peter’s courageous pledge of commitment and self-denial is stifled when Jesus forewarns that Peter will soon be avoiding the truth three times. Did he listen to Jesus? Listening to the words of Jesus often shines a light on our weaknesses and ego-driven tendencies and reveals fears which could impact our future decisions. Are we, like Peter, quick to choose denial rather than face our fears and speak the truth?

## April 16, Holy Saturday

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Lamentations 3:37-58; Psalm 88; Hebrews 4:1-16; Romans 8:1-11

*In corpore moribundo*

What is this poor soul's problem?  
Is it congenital? An errant gene?  
A childhood accident or some desert pandemic?  
A little Biblical context would help, perhaps a footnote  
As a distraction.  
I'd like to check back when there's an upturn in his condition  
Or maybe just skip to Psalm 89.  
What august theologians hit upon this plaint for Holy Saturday?  
"It may be," they admitted, "tough going for our dear readers."  
The path is strewn with scree of unresolved grief.  
Below, greasy waves threaten suffocation  
For the forsaken, forgotten, despised of God.  
This is the Pit.  
Selah. The psalmist tunes his harp and  
Offers a little humor *in extremis*,  
Some bitter jest from the dying man.  
"I'm sure you work wonders for the dead."  
A sardonic respite, but nothing to stem the descent  
Into the terror, the lifelong agony,  
The shunning,  
The crucifixion.

## **April 17, Easter Sunday**

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Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 148; John 1:1-18

Somber Lent is once again behind us, and the bright season of Easter has dawned. You might wonder why the Gospel reading for today is the Prologue to John's Gospel: surely, we hear those verses at Christmas, not Easter! In their wisdom the developers of the Daily Office lectionary gave us these powerful 18 verses for Easter Day, pairing them with the Psalm that shouts praise to God from every corner of creation and with the instructions for celebrating the Passover. For, with the Resurrection of Jesus, the Word incarnate who was in the beginning with God, all of creation has been redeemed (our Orthodox siblings have it right in their art that shows Christ bringing all of humankind up from the grave). This is the Passover of the Lord, in which, as the Great Vigil's liturgy reminds us, we share in his victory over death.

John testifies to the Light of the Word made flesh, and his words call us in turn to testify to the light of resurrection. Jesus, rising from the grave, wounded yet alive, has defeated the power of sin and death, and he calls us to shine his light into a world that desperately needs it.

Easter Day is the first of 50 days of the Easter Season. How will you spend each one of these days of celebration? Can you find someone each day who needs to hear you share the good news of resurrection? Can you shine a light into someone's dark day by offering them the compassion and love that God has offered you? Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ? Let this be your Easter resolution.

“O God, through your Son you have bestowed upon your people the brightness of your light: ... grant that in this Paschal feast we may so burn with heavenly desires, that with pure minds we may attain to the festival of everlasting light; through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (BCP p.285).

Amen, Alleluia!



# Contributors

40 DAYS



LENT

March 2:	Jacqueline FitzGibbon	March 27:	Elizabeth Fitzsimons
March 3:	Stacey Klaman	March 28:	Philip Petrie
March 4:	Vesta Kowalski	March 29:	Mark Lester
March 5:	Blair Shamel	March 30:	Jennifer Jow
March 6:	Diane Lopez Hughes	March 31:	Peter Del Nagro
March 7:	Patricia Kreder	April 1:	Carolyn Lief
March 8:	Daniel Love	April 2:	Dean Hall
March 9:	Cindy Schuricht	April 3:	Irene George
March 10:	Don Mitchell	April 4:	Maya Little-Saña
March 11:	Rockette Ewell	April 5:	Ellen Hargus
March 12:	William Edie	April 6:	Robert Heylmun
March 13:	James Wright	April 7:	Lisa Churchill
March 14:	David Spencer	April 8:	Kristenza Hatch
March 15:	Tom Wilson	April 9:	Andrew Green
March 16:	Konnie Dadmun	April 10:	Richard Hogue
March 17:	Bob Oslie	April 11:	Calvin Johnson
March 18:	Jairus Kleinert	April 12 :	Michael Kilpatrick
March 19:	Rachel Kopel	April 13 :	Richard Lief
March 20:	Deborah Kistler	April 14:	Peter Bolland
March 21:	Kathleen Burgess	April 15:	Brooks Mason
March 22:	Susan Jester	April 16:	Jane Batarseh
March 23:	Kimberly Fernandez	April 17:	Penny Bridges
March 24:	Beverly Edge		
March 25:	Stephanie Pierce	<b><u>Edited by:</u></b>	Calvin Johnson,
March 26:	John Will		Jennifer Jow, & David Spencer

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