

40 DAYS



LENT

February 22 - April 9, 2023



ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL
EPISCOPAL

Love Christ • Serve Others • Welcome All

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

A note from an editor:

Thank you to all our contributors and editors for this year's Lenten reflection booklet! When I took this on, David Spencer left me with all the materials needed to complete this, but it wouldn't be possible without the stories, creativity, and lives behind each of the reflections that follow.

...less two... This year, in an attempt to stretch the bounds of what's possible, two of the reflections are written by the AI program ChatGPT. This was inspired by some helpful suggestions from a coworker here at St. Paul's. You can learn more about the program online.

And with that, I bid you good reading and a meaningful Lent!

~Rev. Cn. Richard Hogue Jr.

Ash Wednesday, February 22

Jonah 3:1-4:11, Psalm 32, Hebrews 12:1-14, Luke 18:9-14

I feel for Jonah. Often, when we do the thing we know is right but don't want to, there is a layer of anger that shrouds our thinking. Jonah neither liked Nineveh nor wanted them to repent, hoping that God would bring destruction and disaster upon his people's oppressors. Yet, God was not done with Nineveh, or Jonah's anger.

Lent is not dissimilar as we begin today with the ashes we came from and will return to again. There is a circuitousness that becomes imminent in this symbol, knowing that while we return to the earth, God isn't done with the ashes. The bleak smudge reminds us that while we may be finished, God is not.

Jonah's anger—perhaps even fear—of God's graciousness to his enemy motivates him to jump ship, to try to flee the coming of God's grace for those he despises. He does not wish to be party to grace. But it's not his to take or give, it is the creator of the dust's choice.

What might we be carrying with us into this Lent that God will ask us to leave behind? Anger, hatred, obsession, despondency, hopelessness? Whatever we carry that is dragging us down, or enticing us to jump ship, will return to dust with us. What are we holding onto that will ultimately be offered to God?

God's never done with anything, and Nineveh and Jonah are proof of that. May this Lent be one of healing and truth for us, and may that set us free from the burdens we unwittingly drape ourselves with, and to God be the glory.

February 23

Deuteronomy 7:6-11, Psalm 37:1-18, Titus 1:1-16, John 17:1-8

If the purpose of Lent is to restore us to equilibrium—and I believe it is—then the 37th Psalm is an excellent way to set the tone here in the early days of our Lenten season.

If the world is seen as a fallen world, then Lent is a time of withdrawal from that lower realm. But if the world is seen as a universal incarnation of the sacred, then Lent means something quite different—not the denial of the material world, but the releasing of egoic attachments, cravings, and fears.

In the place of fear, David counsels us to trust, do good, and take delight—trust in the infinite abundance of the universe, cleave to the simplicity of ethical integrity, and reap the harvest of serenity and joy that results from this shift in consciousness as surely as new grain follows the winter rain.

“Be still...wait patiently...do not fret...” writes David. And the path to this inner serenity is not found by muscling the mind into placidity—as if that were even possible—but through simple allowance. We don’t have to understand it, we simply have to do it. As Thich Nhat Hahn wrote, “There is no way to peace—peace *is* the way.”

Hindus counsel renunciation, Buddhists non-attachment. And here in Hebrew scripture we warm to the same sacred fire: the knowing that when we embrace impermanence and pray the holy mantra *Yes*, we co-create a world where existing power structures start to crumble and hierarchies are upended. “The wicked will be no more,” writes David, and “the meek shall inherit the land and delight...in abundant prosperity.” This is no mere promise of material prosperity. It is the far more significant assurance that when we make the shift in consciousness our Lenten practices engender, the wisdom and peace within us—there all along—will rise into view. It is not a new world we gain, but new eyes with which to see the world—that is what the mindfulness and renunciation of Lent make possible. And those who would harm us, David writes, only harm themselves. “The wicked plot against the righteous...and draw their sword...[but] their sword shall enter their own heart.” Hate harms the hater *more* than the hated. We know that now. And this wisdom informs our renunciation this sacred Lenten season.

St Paul’s Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

February 24

Deuteronomy 7:12-16, Psalm 31, Titus 2:1-15, John 17:9-19

When I was 6 years old, I almost died. I was riding a bicycle without a chain guard when my pantleg got caught between the chain and front sprocket. This happened on the sidewalk right at the end of my neighbor's driveway. Then he started backing out his big Cadillac! My friends, though, started waving and yelling, the man stopped, saw my situation, pulled out a pocket knife, and cut my pantleg.

Luke says that Jesus speaks a phrase from Psalm 31 as he dies: "Into Your hands I commit My spirit."

Maybe because of my early brush with death, life has seemed rather transitory to me. We're here and then we're gone. Along the way, I've lost a special aunt, my mother, my father, my brother, and my girlfriend Jeannine.

From my Presbyterian heritage, one resource I've relied on is the Heidelberg Catechism. Its first question is: What is your only hope in life and in death?

The answer is: That I belong, body and soul, to my faithful Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I say this every morning.

I've also liked the Catholic prayer: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

It's likely that at the end of my life I won't be able to say this myself.

But I hope somebody will be there to pray it on my behalf.

February 25

Deuteronomy 7:17-26, Psalm 30, Titus 3:1-15, John 17:20-26

What does “good works” mean to you?

To be ‘with me where I am’ in my culture is not ‘good works’. One always should strive for more, do more, spend more... I have learned to judge where you are and where I am. When I judge, I lose the present moment. The treasures of seeing and being seen, and the ability to experience what God is asking of us can be lost. When I start from where my siblings are, then I open the possibilities of where we can go together. When I look into someone’s eyes, acknowledge their existence, and let God’s love shine through my smile, then we can step in sync onto the path the Holy Spirit is asking us to travel. I am, with God’s help, changing ‘my’ culture.

Did you know that 2023 is the “Year of Service” in our Diocese?

Expand this act of a smile to the whole of creation: the breezes, the hummingbirds, the trees, the deer, the flowers, the bees, the dirt, the worms, the waters, the fish... If you know who you are in the precise moment your heart smiles, remember that you are not the only one smiling, and that God’s unconditional love encompasses all of creation, then that action can become so much more.

I planted a fruit tree in my front yard. I let my neighbors know that no pesticides are used here. I put a pail out front to hold peels. I say hi to the children with their parents picking a delicious fruit to eat and my smile is huge. How many ways are ‘good works’ being done in this world I live in by the one action of planting a fruit tree in my front yard? God’s abundant love flows in a multitude of ways through this (for me) simple action.

Today’s readings that nourished my heart: “that they may all be one,” “those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works,” “that my soul may praise you and not be silent,” “do not be afraid of them.” Find what touches your heart this day and give your brain a few moments rest.

“Are we there yet or are we holding back?” was asked by Bishop William J. Barber, II in his sermon that can be seen at edsd.org.

St Paul’s Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

February 26

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

Remembering is a focus of the reading from Deuteronomy—remember what God has done and then act accordingly. Remembering is also what we do every time we gather in Jesus' name. We remember God's words to our ancestors in faith: "I will be your God and you will be My people." We remember the stories about our ancestors in faith: how Abraham and Sarah, in their nineties, became parents, and there followed a great multitude of believers. We also remember Jesus: what He taught us, how He lived His life, how He gave up His life that we all might gain life—life as a child of God—brothers and sisters of Jesus—a holy people to whom God gives all good things. May each of us use this Lenten season to remember all these things and then to live our lives as faith-filled followers of Jesus: caring for the poor and the sick, the rich and the healthy, the stranger and our neighbor.

St. Paul came to understand that salvation (grace) is a gift from God, freely given to all who believe in Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. This is the foolishness of the cross that St. Paul wrote about in his letter to the Corinthians. The cross didn't make sense to Paul's contemporaries...nor to many of our contemporaries...nor even to us at times. How can death bring life? How can suffering bring deliverance? How can confronting the powers that be benefit society? Paul saw that the saving acts of Jesus were a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles; for the Jews demanded signs and the Gentiles desired wisdom.

If you are anything like me, you too demand signs, positive outcomes, financial stability. If you are anything like me, you too desire wisdom. But where do we find it? I probably spend too much time online or watching television, and not enough time in prayer and reflection. I don't provide the time and environment for wisdom to show herself to me or to recognize the signs around me. May each of us take on the Lenten practices of prayer and reflection. May we pray for each other to not only desire wisdom but to also cultivate it, to not only hope for signs, but also to be open to perceiving them. May we all witness the foolishness of the cross. "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

February 27

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

Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, so that He may confirm His covenant that He swore to your ancestors, as He is doing today. (NRSV)

Using the search phrase “meaning of Lent” on Google, the first thing I found was: “The purpose of Lent is the preparation of the believer for Easter through prayer, mortifying the flesh, repentance of sins, almsgiving, simple living, and self-denial.”

That comports with my Roman Catholic childhood understanding of Lent as a time we all had to give up something that we either enjoyed or that was otherwise important to us. “What did you give up for Lent?” we would ask each other, mostly to assure ourselves that our own sacrifices had measured up to the self-denial of others.

This passage of scripture from Deuteronomy reminds me that during Lent we never really have to “give up something” that wasn’t given to us in the first place. There is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. Even that which I think I have earned has been generated in the first place by the power only God can give for me to have “earned” it. Everything we have is a gift we receive only because God gives us the ability or the good fortune to be able to count them “ours.” It’s the theological basis for economic justice.

And it is more. According to the writer, the purpose of reminding us that God is our only Provider is “so that He may confirm His covenant that He swore to your ancestors, as He is doing today.”

What if God’s claim on us is not just an appeal to our generosity, and not just a demand for “self-denial,” but instead a call to a greater sense of self-acceptance, to our sense of who and whose we are and therefore what our lives are for, which is to keep God’s covenant of love with all humankind and to make our God-given lives and means count for it?

February 28

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

Oh, we are really pushing it, aren't we? Thinking that we can improve on God's plan, that we're so clever? Like unruly children, we think we're so great that we deserve more.

Like a loving Parent, S/He has given us clear rules to live by.

Loves us so much that S/He gives us a world of beauty with something to please all our senses.

Loves us so much that S/He came to us in human form to teach us to love one another.

We still think we know better, we're stubborn, and we clutter up our God-given beautiful world with irrelevance and ugliness.

Yet through all our bad behavior and carelessness, we are loved beyond understanding by our Heavenly Parent.

God is good.

God is love.

March 1

Deuteronomy 9:13-21, Psalm 119:49-72, Romans 5:12-21, John 2:23-3:15

In Deuteronomy 9:13-21, we read about Moses pleading with God to spare the Israelites, despite their many transgressions. Moses acknowledges that the people have sinned and turned away from God, but he also appeals to God's mercy and asks that God remember His promise to His people. This passage reminds us that, no matter how far we may have strayed from God, we can always turn back to Him and ask for forgiveness.

In Psalm 119:49-72, the psalmist declares his love for God's commandments and seeks to follow them with his whole heart. He acknowledges that following God's ways can be difficult at times, but he also recognizes the rewards that come from living a life of faith. This psalm encourages us to seek out God's will for our lives and to trust in His plan for us, even when it may not be easy.

In Romans 5:12-21, we learn about the sin that entered the world through Adam and the grace that came through Jesus Christ. This passage reminds us that, despite our human flaws and weaknesses, God's love is always available to us. Through Christ's sacrifice, we are offered redemption and the opportunity to live in God's grace.

Finally, in John 2:23-3:15, we read about Nicodemus, a Pharisee who seeks out Jesus to learn more about his teachings. Jesus tells Nicodemus that, in order to enter the kingdom of God, he must be born again of water and the Spirit. This passage reminds us that, in order to truly follow God, we must be willing to undergo a transformation and be open to new ways of thinking and living.

As we reflect on these scriptures during the season of Lent, may we be reminded of God's mercy, grace, and love. May we seek out His will for our lives and be open to transformation, trusting in His plan for us. May we embrace this time of reflection and use it as an opportunity to draw closer to God, so that we may experience His abundant blessings and grace.

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

March 2

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

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

This line is one of the best known in the Bible, hoisted overhead by sport fans, hung from overpasses, the stuff of memes, t-shirts, and coffee mugs. It’s the essential oil version of Christianity. You believe in Jesus, you go to heaven. For me, it’s also a symbol of increasingly wide divisions in our country, and a growing aversion to Christianity by many for its perceived intolerance. In December at St. Paul’s, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry spoke about the negative perceptions about Christianity, and our responsibility to let our light shine.

Later in the John 3:16 passage we see the light: “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”

Believing in Jesus is the starting point. What we do with that belief, how we show up for the people around us, and how we act, is what’s important. Each of us has a beautiful light within – kindness, compassion, generosity, creativity, unique talents and brilliance. We must share our light. We must *be* in the light of God. We must *act* in the light of God, knowing that each of our lights are special and valuable. When we act and serve together, following the example Jesus set for us – speaking out against injustice, fighting for what is right - our collective light is a powerful force for good.

March 3

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

God is Awesome. God has done some incredible things (like make YOU!).

If you trust in the Lord and do what he asks of you, do good unto others, take care of orphans, widows, foreigners (you were a foreigner yourself at one time), you will be protected, and your troubles will ease.

The Word is alive and active in the world. Our words and thoughts, actions and intentions are known and judged. Nothing is hidden. You and God know what you have done, even if others do not.

We have an advocate and High Priest in Heaven, who knows our temptations and how difficult our lives can be. Jesus is known. Jesus is from Heaven and has taught us what God demands from us. Many do not accept His words. Those that do accept them will be blest with eternal life. Those that do not will die.

To me, it is pretty straight-forward. Jesus and God gave us the information we need...

Do good.

Love each other.

Take care of each other.

We've got this! (With a little help from Jesus).

March 4

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

In weaving some thoughts conveyed in today's readings, our eyes are drawn to the partial tapestry: from gifts of the Spirit in the blessing to "choose life" in Deuteronomy; through conduit to God who is the "high priest" in Hebrews; to Jesus's countercultural conversation at the well in John's gospel.

Although we are not all leaders in "the order of Melchizedek," as followers of Jesus and as examples of his love we—like the Samaritan woman—are also important threads in fashioning the beloved community.

Jesus offers living water to the woman and she responds with acceptance ["Sir, give me this water ..."] She chooses life despite the harm [sin] caused by her past choices. She conveys her faith that the Messiah is coming; and as we learn later, she comes to accept Jesus and invites others to His good news.

Our unnamed woman at the well is another example of women who say YES to the Spirit, even though they haven't seen the fine print. They have been invited by angels, prophets or Jesus; women who are rarely welcome at any table of authority. Here is another example of God's inclusion of these delicate yet firm strands in a preference for those perceived as poor in spirit and in society's eyes.

This Lent—and every day!—may we be so bold as to say yes to the Spirit, yes to be the threads of a new cloth in God's kingdom on Earth, however that challenge is conveyed.

March 5

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

Jeremiah isn't most people's favorite prophet: his writings are full of doom and gloom; the prophet himself went in for bizarre performance art to draw attention to the ways in which God's people had abandoned righteousness; he made such a public nuisance of himself that he was imprisoned in an underground cistern and barely escaped with his life. But his language of lament is some of the most beautiful in Scripture, and these first verses of his book reveal a vulnerability that softens the edges of his dire prophecies. When God calls him to a prophetic vocation his response is, "Ah, Lord God, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy," following the example of Moses and Isaiah in the long tradition of protesting one's worthiness for this high calling.

So might any of us respond to a similar call. Who am I to speak for God? Why would anyone listen to me? Such protests are among the many ways we avoid accepting the vocations to which God invites us, along with stopping our ears, getting too busy to stop and pray, and many other excuses. And perhaps we demur for good reason: after all, in Mark's Gospel, Jesus rejects His own family because He is called to speak God's word to a wider family, the whole family of God. We all know where that led, as we make our Lenten journey towards Holy Week and the Cross.

But Jeremiah yields to God's invitation and speaks the words that are placed in his mouth: words of lament, words of warning and judgment, words ultimately of hope, letting them fall where they may, like the seeds in Jesus' parable of the sower. It takes both courage and humility to speak the words God gives us, sharing the good news with those who will listen and with those who turn away. What word has God given you to share in this Lenten season? Will you protest and resist, or will you take up your cross and follow Jesus? "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

March 6

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

A Conviction of Faith

The woman spoke.

She was His chosen disciple.

Questioning her word,

Why did they not believe?

The woman spoke,

And leading the way to Him,

They followed in doubt.

Now, Jesus spoke.

Of love and eternal life,

And they believed.

Her testimony was the truth.

Her conviction of faith, the light.

March 7

Jeremiah 2:1-13, Psalm 61, Romans 1:16-25, John 4:43-54

This past week I was at a business meeting in a hotel. An elderly woman was trying to wheel her husband, who had only one leg, into the lobby bathroom. She was having a very difficult time with it, so I offered to help him. This was quite a feat, even for me. The gentleman was heavy and weak. I had to lift him, remove his clothing, set him on the toilet, wait for him, re-dress him, help him wash up, and return him safely to his wife. After about 30 minutes, he looked up at me and said, "It is real hell being an amputee. You are a true gentleman. I don't know how I could ever repay you." My response was, "Enjoy your evening with your lovely wife, that is how you can repay me." I wanted to cry.

As Episcopalians we believe as written in Romans that "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.*" It is a constant that we attest to every time we listen to scripture as nourishment for our souls, feeding us strength during times when we question the justness of the human condition, why some of us are perfectly intact, while others suffer from disease, heartache, or sadness.

And through the Gospel, do we not gain strength in our faith and belief that God is always there for us? As David proclaims in Psalm 61, "*From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I,*" we often turn to God in trying times as our strength. Think of how Jesus turned to His Father during His weakest moments on the cross.

As I embark on Lent each year, I find myself reflecting on my own trials and tribulations, often turning inward towards self-reflection and what this time of year means to me—how I can better myself as a human. This year I am challenging myself to think beyond the self, to explore outward to find those who may not be as fortunate as me who are reaching for strength and spiritual nourishment. I will take what I've learned in this faith to pass along to those in need not for self-gratification, but to truly share in the human condition of life to love one another. Isn't that what this is all about?

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

March 8

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

Jeremiah's message is repentance, reconciliation, and a plea to return to God. The people of Judah are spiritually lost. Moreover, Judah knows that the *faithless Israel* to the north already has a ruptured relationship with God. Because of Israel's idolatrous ways, God (metaphorically) gave Israel a decree of divorce and sent her into exile.

Rather than see Israel as a cautionary tale, Judah went ahead and ruptured her relationship with God through idolatry. God sends Jeremiah to the north to proclaim: "Return, faithless Israel. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful. I will not be angry forever." Why Israel and not Judah as well? Israel was more righteous and, if invited, would more honestly repent. But Judah was unfaithful, and when given the opportunity to return to God, she did not do so with all her heart but only in the pretense of repentance.

One lesson I drew from this reading is that reconciliation (reunion) with God and one another requires repentance (remorse). But people are good at side-stepping repentance and reconciliation, especially with each other. We sometimes think that fractured relationships, if ignored, will magically mend. We may offer non-apologies such as, "I'm sorry you feel that way." We may skirt around the word "forgiveness" by saying "no problem" even though there was a problem.

In Jeremiah, God doesn't avoid repentance and reconciliation because God takes relationships seriously. God calls us to do the same. Genuine repentance and reconciliation may be uncomfortable, but we can grow closer to God and each other in these vulnerable moments. When we are willing to admit our wrongs toward God, we can walk together with God. So, too, when we are willing to admit our wrongs toward one another, we can walk together. If God has a persistent, relentless, unshakable love for us, maybe we can strive to have a persistent, relentless, unshakable love for God and one another.

March 9

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

Psalm 71, vv.17-18, reads: “O God, from my youth You have taught me, and I still proclaim Your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim Your might to all the generations to come.”

I have been a Christian all my life having been baptized as an infant, growing up in the Presbyterian denomination and being confirmed in the Episcopal Church when I was in college. I am grateful that through the trials and tribulations, the joys and successes of my life, I have almost always been able to proclaim God’s love and wondrous deeds.

I recently turned 80, and though I don’t necessarily *feel* old, my body tells me that old age is creeping up on me. Along with that comes some wondering and a little anxiety about what the future will bring for me and my husband, Richard, who is slightly older than I. I wonder if I will have patience (not one of my better virtues), mental acuity, physical strength, and wisdom. I know those will all be needed.

Like the psalmist in verses 20-21, I will remember that “You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the Earth You will bring me up again. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again.”

I look to this Lenten time to grow deeper in my relationship with Jesus to whom God has given all honor and power, so that in the days ahead I will, with God’s help, continue to proclaim the wondrous deeds of the Lord.

March 10

Jeremiah 5:1-9, Psalm 69:1-38, Romans 2: 3-18, John 5:30-47

In Jerusalem, John heard the voice of Jesus speak in Aramaic, a Syrian dialect, which John later translated into Koine Greek, just as we hear and read the Bible translated into various tongues. More importantly, however, John “conveys, not only the sounds uttered or the meaning then apprehended, but the meaning which, always there, has been disclosed by lifelong mediation,” so William Temple affirms. Translating scripture is an exacting task which requires close attention to vocabulary, syntax and grammar preceded by a humble appeal for the Holy Spirit’s inspiration. And no text is more deserving of profound attention than Jesus’s shocking rebuttal to Jewish interpretation of the commandments than John 5: 30-47.

We are at the pool of Bethesda, where Jesus heals a paralytic man, an action forbidden on the Sabbath. The religious authorities, seeing the healed man carrying his pallet, challenge Jesus. For He had broken the letter of the law and it was reasonable to question Him. In answer to the Jews’ legal argument, Jesus counters boldly, “I can do nothing on My own authority; as I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I seek not My own will but the will of Him who sent Me.” Sabbath or not, Jesus had compassion on this man, who had suffered for thirty-eight years, and healed him, not as a conjurer but as one who loves beyond all human understanding.

Anticipating the Jews’ rebuttal of His claims, Jesus states, God’s “voice you have never heard, His form you have never seen; and you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him who He has sent. You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to Me.” Jesus challenges them to reread the words of Moses. As legalistic scholars entrenched in their own analysis, they cannot comprehend who this man is, who has perfectly obeyed the strictures of the commandments, especially the third, which defines the Sabbath as “a segment of time belonging especially to God, (RSV).” God, being Love, has acted rightly. Who is to gainsay God? The divinity of Jesus threatens their fundamental authority and rigid understanding. Jesus offers to them a continuity for their faith, the brilliant hope of spiritual revelation, namely, a God who descends so mercifully incarnate into human history.

St Paul’s Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

March 11

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

Of the readings for today, the one that seemed to resonate with me the most was Paul's Letter to the Romans. I believe this reading provides that great assurance that salvation is there for everyone. Not by simply doing the work that we should do, but also by having that faithful obedience to God.

More than that, this salvation is not only for the Jews, but it is for all of us! We do not receive salvation simply from accident of birth but from our personal faith and love of Jesus Christ.

To me this is so powerful. I believe that the incarnation—the birth of Christ—was such a gift to us. By itself, I believe we received salvation. But the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection was that further step of God's love for us.

With all this in mind, I know I must do all I can to follow His commandments: To love the Lord your God and to Love your neighbor as yourself. Simple words but sometimes very difficult to fulfill.

March 12

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

The possessed man in Mark's gospel, who was raving among the tombs, evokes the horror of being outside the orderly powers of civilization. The demons have stripped him of every shred of humanity. But he recognizes that Jesus is the Holy One of God. He says his name is Legion, as he is possessed of many demons. This may have been a veiled reference to the violent and oppressive Roman military force, which was occupying the land.

At the command of Jesus, this man is healed and transformed. Healing involves transformation, not mere restoration of the status quo. Jesus empowers the man to preach the good news, sending him home to family and friends to tell them what God has done for him.

The townspeople, who had lost their herd of pigs, wanted no more of this. . Their daily routines had been unsettled. They wanted the disturbing element removed as quickly as possible. They wanted Jesus to leave. Healing involves the breaking down of traditional boundaries so that people formally excluded from the community are included.

A few years ago, the newspapers ran a story of a man who was threatening himself and others with a large knife. The police were called. Upon arriving at the scene, they pointed their pistols at him, ordering the man to drop the knife – but to no avail. One of the officers began to talk with the man. The officer and the disturbed man discovered that they shared, as veterans, the trauma and horror of war. The man eventually put down his weapon. Overcome with his identification with the man who he had encountered, the policeman eventually was able to embrace him.

We are embraced by Jesus, and by those who care for us. We are healed of all our infirmities and called to live transformed lives. Wonder of wonders, we are made a new creation!

March 13

Jeremiah 7:1-15; Psalm 80; Romans 4:1-12; John 7:14-36

The singular theme throughout the scriptures for today is self-examination and an exhortation to look at what we might think of as our righteousness. Indeed, we have no righteousness without the Spirit of God, and as Jesus points out, if we think we do, we do not glorify God but only ourselves.

She and her companion sat at the next table from me when she asked for a box to take home the pasta that she could not finish. She had raved about how good it was and how she looked forward to warming it up at home the next day and enjoying it again. They paid up at the same time my table did and we left together. On the way to her car, she encountered a homeless woman who asked her for money. "Have you eaten today?" she asked. The homeless woman showed her an empty cracker box. "Only this and it wasn't full," she replied. Without a second thought the woman from the restaurant handed over her coveted box of left-over pasta. "I think you will like this," and she walked toward her car.

I was close enough to watch this and it struck me that here was a person whose compassion for someone less fortunate superseded her own desire to enjoy the pasta. I thought, now here is a Child of God of the sort that Jesus calls us to be. I have no idea if the woman was or is a church goer, but her unselfish act surely brought her into the household of God, whether she realized it or not.

Thus are we called to examine our own lives and the extent we willingly help others who are less fortunate. They need not be a homeless person. They may be a friend or a fellow church goer in need. It is that willingness, extended without weighing the cost to ourselves, that redeems us and brings us closer to what God has in mind for us. It is particularly appropriate that in the season of Lent we conduct such an examination of our lives. Don't know anyone in need right now? Well, how about getting that stack of pants you don't wear any longer over to Claudia to be distributed to people she knows need them. It's not enough to engage in Lenten prayers without Lenten renewal, and now is your chance.

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

March 14

Jeremiah 7:21-34, Psalm 78:1-39, Romans 4:13-25, John 37-52

“Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, ...He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not come again.”

A reminder that though we so often are ungrateful for God’s goodness and blessings, He forgives us. Though we forget or ignore his teachings, He remains steadfast in his compassion toward us, offering again and again the opportunity to remember and follow.

Lent, a time of stillness, offers us that opportunity. A time to seek forgiveness from others that we may have wronged; A time of stillness to sit in God’s presence mindful of the teaching, “... Be still and know that I am God.”

May we use these weeks to be still.

March 15

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

Jeremiah paints a dark picture of his world. He is surrounded by evil-doers, idolaters and adulterers. He is crushed, he mourns, and horror grips him. Jeremiah couldn't trust anyone. Is the Comforter he mentions the Holy Spirit?

Suffering is mentioned in the Psalm, and in Jeremiah. Paul tells us in Romans that we glory in our sufferings. Our sufferings produce perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Contrast this to the Psalmist, who delights in the law, because the law is sweeter than honey. Even though the wicked have set a snare, he did not stray from the precepts. The Psalmist says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." And John tells us Jesus, the word made flesh, is the light of the world.

How can we live in Jeremiah's sinful world, yet love the statutes? We can because we have our light and life in Christ. We need not despair like Jeremiah, because Christ illuminates our way, even though we do not follow the law perfectly.

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

March 16

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

As we journey through the season of Lent, we are reminded of the importance of repentance and turning towards God. The scripture passages for today - Jer. 10:11-24, Psalm 42, Rom. 5:12-21, and John 8:21-32 - offer a powerful message of hope and redemption.

In Jeremiah 10:11-24, we hear of the consequences of straying from God's path. The passage reminds us that the idols we worship - whether they be material possessions or worldly desires - can never truly satisfy us. Only God can provide us with the peace and fulfillment we seek. This Lenten season, we are called to examine our lives and ask ourselves if we have put our faith in anything other than God. If so, we must seek His forgiveness and turn our hearts towards Him.

Psalm 42 continues this theme of longing for God. The psalmist cries out, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God" (v. 1). Just as the deer longs for water, we must long for God and seek Him with all our heart. When we feel lost or overwhelmed, we must remember to turn to Him and trust in His love and mercy.

Romans 5:12-21 offers us the hope of salvation through Christ. Though we were all born into sin, through Jesus we can be redeemed and made new. This passage reminds us that no matter how far we may have strayed from God, we can always turn back to Him and be saved.

Finally, in John 8:21-32, Jesus tells us that only the truth can set us free. He encourages us to seek the truth and to follow Him, for He is the way, the truth, and the life. During this Lenten season, we must ask ourselves if we are living in truth. Are we being honest with ourselves and with God? If not, we must seek His forgiveness and ask for the courage to live in truth.

As we reflect on these scripture passages, let us remember the importance of turning towards God and seeking His truth. May this Lenten season be a time of transformation and renewal, as we strive to live in His light and love.

March 17

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

“O Lord, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me?”

Lately I have been thinking about Jesus’ last uttered words in Mark, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Clearly Jesus’ cry echoes words like those above from Psalm 88. And like this psalm, His words are a question which (at least in the immediate context) is not answered. How do these uncomfortable lamentations fit in the *Good News*? Why are they in the Bible at all?

Some of us might just as soon skip over passages like this, but I think they represent an intellectual honesty which is one of the reasons why I am a Christian. Over and over again both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament show us people acting in dubious ways—and I’m talking about the “good” people here—Adam, David, Peter, etc. Taken in its entirety, the Bible seems to want to show us the full range of human attitudes and behavior without sugar-coating. And that also extends to its depictions of faith, of what faith really is. The Bible suggests that faith is not absolute unchanging belief in a set of dogmas—faith is more like a relationship, and, at least at our end, it changes as we change. The writer of Psalm 88 is probably mortally ill and feels God’s absence just when he or she most needs God’s comforting presence. Like Job though, this writer keeps up the conversation, no matter how silent God seems to be. That to me is real faith. I remember hearing that Mother Theresa had long bouts of spiritual dryness. She is quoted in Wikipedia as saying,

“Where is my faith? Even deep down [...] there is nothing but emptiness and darkness. [...] If there be God – please forgive me. When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul.”

At an exalted level, the level of the mystics, we call this “the dark night of the soul,” the stripping away of all comforts that prepares the soul for ultimate union with God. At a more mundane level, we can simply say that doubt, even spiritual emptiness, is a part of faith. Even when God is silent—especially when God is silent—we continue the conversation.

St Paul’s Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

March 18

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

What does it mean to obey? To whom do we owe obedience?

One obvious answer is that, as people of faith, we owe obedience to God. We do so by praising God and testifying through our daily actions to God's presence in our lives. We profess that God loves us "wherever we are on the journey of faith," and the psalmist reminds us that it's important to love God in return. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength," and "your neighbor as yourself" are Bible verses many of us learned as children.

Loving our neighbors as ourselves also requires a form of obedience. As Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans, just because we love God doesn't mean that we are free *not* to love our neighbors. As Jesus people, we strive to reflect our Savior in all we do, knowing that by doing so we are working to create God's Kingdom on earth.

Finally, obedience to God means that we have an obligation to follow God's will for our lives. This is a tough one: how do we know what's God's will and what's our will? The answer, I think, lies in prayer. A former Dean of the Cathedral said that there's one basic prayer we can use: "Help!" If we keep our minds ready to be helped, and if we consciously ask for help, Scripture tells us that we will be blessed with the help we need, though not necessarily the help we thought we wanted!

Laetare Sunday, March 19

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

Laetare Sunday (*laetare* means “rejoice”), the 4th Sunday in Lent, can be understood as a liturgical invitation to relax a little from the rigors of Lent, with the end in sight. We’re more than halfway to Easter. For the day, purple gives way to the lighter pink. And the epistle and gospel in the daily readings can be read, in this context, to refer to our yearning to reach the next life, the promised land. “I will raise them up at the last day,” we hear Jesus saying—and because this gospel reading is often used at funerals, we are probably programmed to hear these words in the context of the next life, where we can lay down our burdens and relax at last.

But not so fast! No, children, we’re not there yet. There’s still a lot of the journey ahead of us—three more weeks of Lent, or, if we include the reading from the Old Testament to provide a different context, perhaps much of a lifetime.

The story about Israel (better known as Jacob) blessing Joseph’s sons, and apparently doing it wrong by giving the second-born the first-rate blessing and vice-versa, reflects a theme that is very strong throughout both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures: God has work for us to do, and God creates or chooses the person to suit the work. Each of the boys got the blessing—the gifts—necessary for the work he was expected to do. And at the end of the reading, Joseph, born 11th out of 12 sons, got the extra portion that typically goes to the first-born. God matches the gifts to the need.

In this context, the other readings can be seen to speak more to this life that we are living now—this journey that we are on—than our final destination.

When Paul talks about the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead giving life to our mortal bodies, that is life for the here and now, the kind of life we need to live as Christians, the kind of life that enables us to “bear witness that we are children of God,” the kind of life that helps us “set free creation itself from its enslavement.” And Jesus, who is in John’s gospel the bread of life, gives us this bread as nourishment for our day-to-day lives as those who carry on his work in the world.

So rejoice today! Relax today! And then let’s get back to doing God’s work.

St Paul’s Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

March 20

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

In the early 2010s, in pursuit of a career in fashion, I found my way into an internship with a fashion marketing company. I impressed my boss with my ability to simultaneously double check event guest lists on a tablet while replying to emails on my laptop while consulting with him on speaker phone. I was soon promoted to lead my own team, though he did have one condition: that I worked on being less nice. “You’re giving away your personal power by being so nice.”

On the eve of a product launch event for a major client, my boss heard me on the phone with a member of my team, Jane, who was in the middle of a breakdown: Jane was supposed to show up to the venue in an hour to help us all set up, but she was also behind in studying for a midterm for a class she was failing. I told her to take the night off. My boss snatched my phone out of my hand, and proceeded to berate her for five minutes before hanging up on her. “I thought I was teaching you to be successful, not soft,” he sneered at me. Jane showed up two hours later and helped us set up, as planned, though she cried the entire time. My boss had successfully used his might to shame Jane into doing exactly what he wanted her to do. Both Jane and I quit not long after.

Now, over 10 years later, though I lost those career ambitions and somehow find myself spending most of time working in various church ministry and nonprofit contexts, I find that still embedded somewhere within me is the temptation to believe that if I tap into a certain way of being: that if I am assertive enough or winsome enough or sound intelligent or convincing enough, that I could and should somehow sway others to do exactly what I want them to do or think exactly how I want them to think. And, that at times I fail to convince others of seeing things my way or doing things I think they should do, this somehow means that I’ve failed.

But thankfully, as the Psalmist reminds us in today’s readings, our Lord God of Hosts, Who is like no other, is mighty. And because God is mighty, I do not have to be. Instead, I can focus on doing what I believe God made us all to do: to sing of God’s love and proclaim God’s faithfulness, and to let God’s love and faithfulness sing through me.

St Paul’s Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

March 21

Jeremiah 17:19-27; Psalm 97; Romans 7:13-25; John 6:16-27

As I child, I thought the Jeremiah reading was worse than boring—who could even do nothing for a whole day? And yet, the Jeremiah passage clamored, “Pick me.” With the insights of others, I now see this passage, not as a threat, but as a statement of what we could miss if we do not accept this unimaginably rich gift from God who invites us into a full, complex relationship.

Ancient cultures measured time in the changing of the seasons. Life was cyclical and overall unchangeable. Until God commanded a sabbath day of rest for everyone. In **The Gift of the Jews: How a Tribe of Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels**, Thomas Cahill argues this was the beginning of history and the concept that time moves forward.

A day of rest allows for a day of freedom from the drudgery of life, leaving room for the idea of freedom—the beginning of the arc of justice and of our efforts to shed internal chains and turn our eyes to the Kingdom of God. That’s a lot and would have been enough.

But wait, there’s more. The sabbath keeps on giving. Matthew Fox, in **Original Blessings**, says “all are called to be co-creators with God.” Sabbath allows us to hear God’s whisper of inspiration, to see and to manifest, as best we can, the beauty of God’s world and Kingdom through story, painting, dance, song, architecture, science—too many ways to list.

This morning I happened to read Mark 2:27, and it seemed a sign. Jesus told the offended, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath.”

In our world, we often use Sunday to get ready to do Monday’s work. While I doubt God is a stickler for a particular day, I think we receive more than we imagine when we set aside time to meet God and share prayer, study, rest, play, freedom and creativity. Thanks be to God.

March 22

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

The pandemic has been hard on many of us. Even though I have remained blessed with health, employment, and loved ones, I feel weighed down by my responsibilities, that I am not doing my best for my students, my colleagues, my friends and family.

In that context Jeremiah's extravagant, visceral metaphor of the potter remaking a flawed vessel strikes me in the gut. I can smell the wet clay, feel hands forming a pot as it spins on the wheel. But the pot is unbalanced, imperfect, and the frustrated potter collapses the clay back to a shapeless lump before beginning again. With a pinch of projection, I feel sorry for the flawed vessel—was it really that bad? Did it deserve destruction and erasure? Or is reconstruction into something wholly new and different something to be desired? Should I remake my life—spend more time helping students, be nicer to strangers, exercise more? Round and round spin my thoughts, as if on a potter's wheel, until I feel disoriented and lost.

Paul catches a lot of criticism, but in his winding, Pauline way he offers an answer. Measuring against a standard of perfection, focusing on things and events, is ultimately the way of death. No vessel will be without flaw; a perfectionist will crush and reshape the clay, over and again. The way off the spinning wheel is to not seek perfection, guided by signs and wonders, but to embrace the nourishing love of Jesus, the very bread of life. Unlike Jeremiah, Jesus did not rant against flawed people. Instead, He fed them, He healed them, He assured those society had thrown away as trash—the poor, the sick, the disabled, foreigners, prostitutes, heretics, even Roman collaborators—that God loved them as much as the “perfect,” the rich, the powerful, the beautiful, and even the saintly. Good news, indeed, for all of us flawed vessels.

March 23

Jeremiah 22: 13-23; Psalm 69:1-38; Romans 8:12-27; John 6: 41-51

My reflection is on the Gospel of John reading that is assigned for today. I think it is a good idea to go to the beginning of Chapter 6 and then read the assignment for today. If you only read the assigned verses, you are starting a mystery halfway through the book.

The Jews had experienced the miracle of the loaves and fishes. After that miracle, Jesus and the disciples left the crowd. The disciples went by boat to Capernaum. Jesus walked on water to meet them. Witnessing these events, the Jews got in boats and traveled to Capernaum. There were a lot of questions about the events. Jesus explained to them that he came from his Father in Heaven, and they must eat the bread of Heaven for everlasting life. The bread from Heaven was not like the manna of the wilderness. Now this really confused them. Here is the son of Joseph and Mary and he is telling them his Father is in Heaven? The bread is his flesh, he explained. The Jews couldn't believe this was true. He is asking them to have Faith and to believe in God.

It is the same today. We are to recognize Jesus in the bread made Holy. The Iona invitation precedes our Eucharists, inviting all to Jesus's table. Each Sunday morning before 7 AM, Lucky Kemrer, a facility staff member, opens the cathedral and turns on all the lights. As he says, "He is opening the doors of his Father's house for the people to come." Then at 7 AM the Altar Guild arrives to prepare the Holy table. The priests bless the bread and wine, and the people meet Jesus at the altar, His table.

Please, join me at the Holy table to meet Jesus in the bread and wine made Holy.

March 24

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

The prophet Jeremiah speaks from a war-torn nation, but in the midst of his suffering he foretells a Christian hope: to come into our true homeland with all the people of God. Lamenting the pain of life, the psalmist recognizes God's hand in his trials. Lost like a lonely bird in the wilderness, realizing that this world is ephemeral, he understands that God alone endures. Thus our relationship with God becomes our North Star.

Paul reassures us: when we love God all our sorrows work for the good. His beautiful words in Romans 8:38-39 express the deepest faith and vouch for our desire never to be separated from God's love. With God's help Paul transformed into someone whose words have lasted through the millennia.

In John's gospel, Jesus offers us a spiritual life and avows it is the only true life. As we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we become like a bird that, rather than being lost and alone, floats in God's love, the depth and strength of which is shown by the cross.

We can prepare ourselves during Lent to embrace this spiritual life and enter our own desert of prayer and contemplation. For a novice on the spiritual path, a possible first step is to identify one fault and concentrate on ameliorating that. I like this idea. I'm going to start with examining my eating habits. Instead of engaging in thoughtless food consumption, I want to see myself as God's child, who is called to honor the divine within.

I believe the Holy Spirit helps me transfigure my earthly and my egoistic loves and concerns to awareness of a higher love. I have parental love for my son - but I must learn to let him go. I consider getting a bigger house during the pandemic - but suddenly am struck by how much I need to, and do, appreciate where I am right now. Some relatives "bug me" - but it dawns on me that is because I love them. I feel I have a personal affliction - then one day I realize it teaches me, and that God allows it to teach me.

I am a slow disciple in love. But I can practice patience, and, with the faith of the mustard seed, open to the Holy Spirit and transform.

St Paul's Cathedral - 40 Days of Lent - February 22 - April 9

March 25

Jeremiah 23:9-15; Psalm 107:33-43; Romans 9:1-18; John 6:60-71

The readings for today echo a familiar, if not an agonizingly repetitive story. God gives and takes away. God blesses and punishes. And, somehow, if you believe, you will be blessed and all will be well, right? Do you believe? What do you believe and so what?

This is what I believe:

I believe in God, Creator of heaven and earth. God created all, and things are just things: not good or evil. I am part of the “sauce” of creation and my battle against entropy is constant, burdensome, difficult, and ultimately ends in my death. From this constant struggle, the idea of good and evil emerges because of my drive for survival; indeed, God gave me this knowledge to help me make choices that further my survival. And that is the key. I get to choose, and that is a blessing.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s son. The teachings of Jesus shows me how, in the context of love, I can see things differently, and this gives me a more nuanced basis from which I can decide what is good and evil. I can use love to act accordingly, and that is a blessing.

I believe in the forgiveness of sins. Bad things happen. Some are under my control. Most are not. Forgiveness allows me to reconcile the incomprehensibility of why a supposedly loving God allows bad things to happen to us, and why God’s children do bad things to each other. Forgiveness gives me the means by which I can put evil in its place and try my best to continue to pursue good. And that is a blessing.

Am I blessed because I believe? Yes. Is believing in God, believing in Jesus, and being a Christian the only way? No. But it is my way, and for me, that is a blessing.

March 26

Jeremiah 23:16-32; Psalm 118; 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; Mark 8:31-9:1

It's not (necessarily) about you.

Jeremiah—(Prophets, Rulers, Priests, Leaders) who proclaim false claims (prophecies, conspiracies, personal attacks) in God's name are toast.

1 Corinthians—Paul is defending himself against criticisms that some have made against him. They don't like his style and they want to "cancel" him. He does not suggest that anyone be like him, but he describes himself as an athlete who strives to win.

Mark—It is quite clear that Peter does not understand Jesus' willingness to be identified with the Roman instrument of torture and oppression. Do I understand that my "cross" is not the same as Jesus' or yours or Peter's? I need to ponder what it means to deny my self and what it means to pick up my cross.

Be wary of prophets, priests, rulers, or anyone who assumes or proposes that they know what God wants from you beyond some basics. God wants me to listen, to pay attention, and to act. This leads to doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly. It has taken and will take the whole of my life to work this out or play this out. I believe, with all my heart, that God is inviting you on a similar journey.

The church community was invented so that we might play together as the Jesus movement. Come play with Jesus' friends like Paul and Jeremiah and Ruth and Mary and Peter and Penny and Lisa — and me.

March 27

Jeremiah 24:1-10, Psalm 31, Romans 9:19-23, John 9:1-17

All of today's readings are tied together by dichotomy: polarity, contrast, conflict, division. Jeremiah is terribly punitive: good figs/bad figs—good folks/bad folks; and the latter have a heap of trouble coming from God! They are “a disgrace,” and destruction is promised. Where's the redemption in that?! No wonder some find little comfort in the Bible taken literally and in short snippets.

The psalm offers some respite, in the belief that even in our brokenness, the Lord is to be trusted by those who have faith. Then Romans returns us to a punitive/judging God who chose some for wrath and some for glory... yet considering all with patience and mercy.

And perhaps that's the point: John reminds us that Jesus—grace? redemption? hope?—exists in quiet miracles: those things “quickly done and gone”, perhaps not blared by the news, but felt viscerally, known personally, maybe even subversive to dominant culture. Like the blind man, we should recognize and name the prophets yet among us.

March 28

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

Realizing that God watches over us at all times is very comforting. There is never one moment when He doesn't have His loving eye on us. God doesn't sleep, so even when we are asleep, He is watching us.

God is our protector and our hiding place. He is the place we run to when we are hurting, in trouble, or in any kind of danger. I remind myself daily, God is watching me right now! Remembering, His watchful eye over me comforts me. It helps me to realize that nothing is hidden from God, and it increases my desire to live a life that pleases Him.

If you are afraid of anything right now, just remember that God is watching over you, He is with you. If you are hurting physically or emotionally, He is with you to comfort you. God loves you very much, and He delights in meeting your needs and giving you the desires of your heart.

We also have God's promise that "all things work together for good" to those who love Him and want His will (Romans 8:28), so if something happens that doesn't seem good at first, we can trust God to work something beneficial out of it ultimately.

March 29

Jeremiah 25:30-38; Psalm 119:145-176; Romans 10:14-21; John 10:1-18

Voices, crying out, and hearing, all figure in today's readings. God calls, and we respond; or, we cry out, and God meets us in our distress. We can experience the holiness of God in many ways, but our tradition often describes it in ways that have an auditory component. Think Moses and the voice from the burning bush, or St. Paul hearing the voice of Jesus on the road to Damascus, or Martin Luther and the thunderstorm, or even the apocalyptic trumpets in Revelation.

How do we hear God's voice? In today's reading from John, the sheep follow the Good Shepherd because they recognize His voice. I suspect each of us recognizes and hears God's voice in a unique way, determined by the range of individual experiences which shape our inner lives. The history of spirituality has many chapters in which mystics, as well as fairly ordinary folk, describe the very particular ways in which they've encountered, and truly heard, God speak to them. For some, God is heard in the silence of prayer, for others in music, and still for others, in service. God's voice is beyond a single human experience.

In the reading from Romans, St. Paul writes that we hear God's voice by listening to the proclamation of the word of Christ. "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17; NRSV). But to be honest, the truth inherent in this verse seems to me to be only half of it. For genuine meeting or relationship with God to occur, for truly hearing God's voice, our own voices also need to be raised to God. "With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord" (Ps. 119:145). It's all about call and response. God calls his flock and we respond because we recognize His voice; we cry to God and She responds in love, because we are Hers.

Give us the grace to listen for your voice, O God, wherever and however it comes to us, and also give us the grace to cry out to you, our Maker, Redeemer, and Shepherd.

March 30

Jeremiah 26:1-16; Psalm 131; Romans 11:1-12; John 10:19-42

I'm guessing that quite a few of us here in the cathedral community have now and then stumbled through periods of desolation in which the big things of life (vocation, affection, health, money) were not working out the way we planned. Maybe these periods are still with us — and persistent. Maybe that's why we're now seeking the kingdom of heaven at St. Paul's as we try to discern God's will for our next steps.

So here's the apostle Paul in Romans 11. Usually he presents himself as a confident, clear-headed person, fortified by faith. But not in this passage. Instead, he struggles — with scripture, with prophetic vision, and probably with God in prayer, because he can't understand why, despite his missionary success with gentiles, relatively few of his Jewish co-religionists are coming to faith in Jesus as Messiah. His resolution for this state of affairs, not quite satisfying, is that God has "hardened" most of Israel until the "full number of gentiles" become believers, after which the endtime will appear and "all Israel" will be saved" (11:7, 25-26).

As Paul's convoluted discourse draws to a close, things still don't seem totally right, and he must concede that human reason has met its limits. "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (11:33). Sometimes this is the most we Christians can say in the face of what's happening to us and our world. Yet Paul would insist that our surrender to God's majesty is actually no cause for despair. For him, the darkness of our intellect and the weakness of our faith become God's special opportunity to reveal beautiful new forms of mercy (11:32) that will cause us to stand in awe and praise (11:36).

Here is Paul's lesson for himself, and for us. Hang on, he says, and as you do so, remember that you are always befriended by no less than "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:13).

March 31

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

In an unusual moment of positivity, Jeremiah encourages the exiled people to “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce; take wives, have sons and daughters.”

It reminds me of my favorite way to think of Lent—it is the acceptable time!

An acceptable time prayer:

God, I would put my house in order; Clear out the dry gray cobweb Of stale customs

that hang thick upon Window and wall, that choke Garret and cellar and let in the sun Of fearless thought.

I would, remorseless, sweep Old broken dreams that clutter Dusty corners, that supinely sleep Beneath dark recessed eaves, to make Place for new dreams, staunch, purposeful.

I would wipe out old moldering grief and take For it clean, golden memories;

scour with sand Of true repentance stains of old sin;

Then fling my door wide, God, and bid you look within. Amen

Edith Mirick, (c. 1930)

April 1

Jeremiah 31:27-34, Psalm 137:1-9, Romans 11:25-36, John 11:28-44

Lent, and in particular, this, the eve of Holy Week, bring us back to the precipice of having chosen to live a life based on self-will; and a turning, or returning to a life lived based on the will of God.

Initially, the Psalm reading today upset my modern sensibilities with its language verse 9. I had initially decided that I was going to just ignore that reading. However, when I re-read it without the final line, I understood what the writer was expressing. As a formerly incarcerated person, I am intimately familiar with the feelings of despair and longing expressed by the opening line, “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.” It is a place just on this side of hopeless, where hope really is the only thing one has—so we persevere.

Most people don't have the experience of being a physical captive. So, in their brilliance the people who decide on the relatedness of the readings, offered another, more universal experience to help connect us to the feelings of despair and longing that seem to be the prerequisite as we make that leap of faith, returning to God. The experience of the death of a loved one. Nothing ever prepares us for the profound sense of despair and longing. It is also a place just on this side of hopeless, where hope is really the only thing one has—so we persevere.

Today, from that dark, lonely place, we hear Jesus, calling us from the grave, back to life.

Today, from that dark and lonely place we who find ourselves at the precipice again, hear the words of Jeremiah, that promise, “For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.”

Palm Sunday, April 2

Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalms 24, 29; 1 Timothy 6:12-16; and Matthew 21:12-17

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it...” (Psalm 24:1) the psalmist reminds us. We believe there is no coherence much less any true relationships around us; that we are completely alone, and everything is up to us. We forge systems to protect our vulnerabilities and fragile selves. In the process, we lose that connecting vision which saves and frees us from the anxiety of being. Lift your heads the psalmist reminds us, so the King of glory may come in. But first there must be a letting go of and an opening up to.

Jesus cleans the temple: it had accumulated too much authority; achieving control it tarnishes that pure clarity, a reflection of divinity among us. The incarnated one, refracting the brilliance of His Father, takes his place chasing away images, idols, symbols of righteousness and power. All delusions, misrepresentations. Jesus claims true relationship as the only way for reconciliation. No sacrifice without the heart. He opens his, and they come. No barriers to overcome, they come; no expectations, they come; no demands, they keep coming. Abundant love ignites the temple, rekindling flame all throughout the earth. Bushes burn bright, light unveils tender sweetness everywhere. Gentle, fragile, it must be removed. A line has been drawn.

Look up and see the expanse that reigns. Behold the magnitude of space, the depth of time, the movement of grace everywhere. A child is born, the world is in a hush. Incarnation everywhere. You see with your soul, everything belongs. Jesus sits himself upon the donkey and all say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest”. Thus, the first step has been taken. Who follows?

April 3

Jeremiah 12:1-16, Psalms 51:1-20, Philippians 3:1-14, John 12:9-19

With Christmastide a faint memory, and Eastertide on the horizon, Lent provides a timely opportunity for reflection. Even as a cradle Episcopalian, these forty days are a perennial reminder to reset, recharge and renew my faith. As we continue to reel from the impacts of a global pandemic, rampant gun violence and natural disasters, it can be easy to question our faith. I believe that the following verse from Psalms, however, gives us perspective:

“Make me to hear joy and gladness;

That the bones which thou has broken may rejoice.”

--Psalms 51:8

We **all** have broken bones in some way—weary from all that we face in the world. This verse reminds us that being broken is simply part of the human condition. Living in the real world, it is incumbent upon us to rejoice in our faith and “to hear joy and gladness” regardless of the challenges we face. Lent also provides us the space to remember the tenets of our faith and to practice fearless love. As our Presiding Bishop extolls, “If it’s not about love, it’s not about God.” Love lets us hear the joy and gladness, and love helps us heal our broken bones.

This is why “love” is what leads our Cathedral credo: **Love Christ. Serve Others. Welcome All.** Our love of Christ informs our mission to see God’s hand in all of creation. Our desire to serve others embodies our faith in action. And welcoming all is how we share that love with the world—with broken bones or filled with joy and gladness.

April 4

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

We likely have all experienced those times when life's challenges pile up on our doorsteps, and the chaos of the world threatens to overwhelm us in body and spirit. That's where Psalm 6 begins, with the author speaking from the depths of pain and trouble, imploring God to hear his voice and intervene. "Please, God, no more yelling, no more trips to the woodshed. Treat me nice for a change; I'm so starved for affection. Can't you see I'm black-and-blue, beaten up badly in bones and soul? God, how long will it take you to let up?" (v. 1-3, The Message)

What stands out to me is the honesty of the Psalmist, telling God how they really feel, even to the point of blame for their circumstances. Being authentic with each other is hard. Being authentic with God can be harder, especially when things are going badly. We don't know if or when those difficult external circumstances changed. We do know that the Psalm ends with assurance that God hears our prayers, and confidence that abiding joy exists, even in turmoil. "For the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication, the Lord receives my prayers. (v. 8-9, New American Standard)

For the Psalmist, it seems that their painfully honest prayer sparked the beginning of a change of heart that re-framed their world view through a different, heavenly lens.

There's much there for us to contemplate.

April 5

Jeremiah 17: 5-10, 14-17, Psalm 55, Philippians 4:1-13, John 12:27-36

In Paul's letter, he writes "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say Rejoice" (Philippians 4.4). When I looked up the term rejoice, it is to feel or show great joy. Throughout the letters to the Philippians, Paul remarks on his joy through prayer and faith. Paul's use of joy is an important reminder of experiencing deep joy even amid turmoil and it seems like the world around us is struggling with war, hunger, and dehumanizing laws around trans people, just to name a few. Paul lives out the paradox of love with the ability to remind us that we can be tough and tender, excited and scared, brave and afraid. I imagine Jesus had many of these feelings before his death and Jesus also knew he could not avoid this painful outcome. Instead of asking to be spared, Jesus prayed he would be glorified by the Lord all while many of the people rejected Jesus.

It is hard for me to understand this deep joy and love without feeling guilt and even shame about my own moments of joy. While all this is happening in the world, how can I enjoy dinner out with my family. What Paul reminds us of is that these experiences matter because joy matters. It is important for us to feel grateful for all these moments. Whether you are a full-time activist or a volunteer at your church most of us are showing up to ensure others experience joy in some manner. We are all working to make sure people get to experience what brings meaning to life. A life filled with love, belonging and joy. These are all needs for each of us, and we can't give to people what we don't have in our hearts. It's critical to stop and access joy and gratitude as it reminds us of what we're fighting for. It also reminds us of what we want for the rest of the world. It is important to lean into joy and gratitude so we can show up to do our work every day.

I heard a friend say the other day that this has been a horrible year and I'm so glad to shut the door on this year. I shared with her that if she scrolled through her cell phone photos, she would find some moments of joy. We usually take a picture when we have this feeling. In the gospel of John, Jesus shares we can live in the darkness or seek out the light. If we feel guilty about our joy, then the dark wins. The paradox is that we are all made up of light and darkness.

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

Maundy Thursday, April 6

Jeremiah 20:7-11, Psalm 102, 1 Corinthians 10:14-17 11:27-32, John 17:1-26

Jeremiah responds when called to be a prophet: Not me God, surely you could pick someone else. The Lord prevailed and promised to place the needed words in his mouth. Jesus similarly tells his disciples in Luke's gospel that when they are brought before authorities not to worry how to defend themselves. The Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. Despite his words, he suffered arrest, imprisonment, and public disgrace. He delivered warnings, but he was not believed, respected, or listened to. He laments that he ever got involved with this prophesying. He announces he is finished, no more speaking out. But the Lord's message is too strong, he cannot hold it back. Do you ever feel like you have been given a unpopular message to deliver that will subject you to mockery, denunciation, even expulsion from your community? What do you do?

Our psalmist is in deep lament. The Lord had promised to care for him, for the people, and now he is ill, persecuted, Zion is destroyed. He reminds God, I still believe in you, I know you will show mercy to your people and now is a good time for that to happen. Once restored, all people, all nations, will know of your glory and goodness. Does God sometimes need a nudge that we are waiting here for redemption?

Paul reminds the troublesome community in Corinth that they are prone to idolatry. They have strayed from the self-examination and self-discipline expected when they partake of the body and blood. Unless they want to be condemned with the outside world, they need to rethink their way of living, interacting, and worshiping. Perhaps this could be a subject of our own time of reflection during this Lenten fast?

John pushes on this point. We have been warned and ignored the warnings, we have been admonished and ignored the lessons, we have been blessed with the direct presence and dismissed the instruction. Now we will experience the power and the glory, we will see the depth of God's love for us. How will we respond to this inheritance? Does it apply to me? How do I show that love to the world?

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

Good Friday, April 7

Wisdom 1:16-2:1, 12-22, Psalm 22, 1 Peter. 1:10-20, John 13:36-38

Good Friday is not everyone's cup of tea. Some find peace and solace in the solemn liturgy. Some find it all too morose—after all, we know that Easter is just two days away. Jesus' passion and death is a mystery. It is all about Jesus reconciling the world to Himself, and in doing so, showing us how we are called to participate in God's great mission of reconciliation. Our call is to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus, knowing full well that we will stumble and fall along the way. Remember Jesus' words to Peter: "Very truly I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied Me three times." And Peter did deny that he knew Jesus, that he was one of His followers. Yet Peter went on to become a bold preacher and teacher, doing his part to spread the Good News of God in Christ. He was able to do that because he was willing to admit his failings, profess his faith in Jesus and then do what Jesus called him to do, "Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep."

During his ministry, Jesus reached out to those who were thought to be sinners: the man born blind, the woman with the hemorrhage, various people possessed by demons. Jesus also reached out to those who saw themselves as righteous and God-fearing. Jesus broke through the barriers of sin set up between God and humanity so that we all might share in God's love. He disrupted the ways of the world that seek to enslave us all, so that we might live in freedom and truth. He defied the powers of evil so that we might receive the fullness of God's grace. What a consolation that is for us. What a challenge that is for us as well, for we are called to do the same.

In the first letter of Peter we read: "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when He is revealed." That is what the season of Lent has been about, preparing our minds and disciplining our bodies, setting all our hopes on the gifts that Jesus offers us, and then taking action. Forgiving those who harm us: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Making sure others are cared for: "Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother." Assuring others that God truly loves them: "...today you will be with me in paradise."

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

Holy Saturday, April 8

Job 19:21-27a, Psalm 88, Hebrews 4:1-16, Romans 8:1-11

Holy Saturday is, at least in my mind, the least celebrated day of the Christian calendar. It's after Good Friday and its somberness; it's right before Easter with its bewildering joy. It sits at the precipice of oblivion, knowing nothing of Easter, and only contemplating all things mortal. I think it scares us.

And, perhaps that's natural, death is scary. I can only imagine the numbing reality that beset the disciples and other followers of Jesus that day. Perhaps there were still convicts and rebels slowly dying on crosses on Golgotha, but Jesus' was empty. There was little proof He ever existed aside from the memories of Him on the minds and in the hearts of His companions. That had to feel as if they had left one reality and were thrust into another.

They didn't know how true that was, they couldn't know how true that was. The truth for them was that this was it. All the memories, all the parables, all the healings and parties and feasts and confrontations amounted to... what?

And so we stand before the tomb, where the remnants of a lost friend becomes putrid memory. The inevitable scent of death would be their only grip left of him, linens hiding the terrible truth. We are all vulnerable, we are all frail, and even those we think can solve everything are ultimately dust, and will return to dust. The bleak smudge of Ash Wednesday is far more real now than ever.

Celebrate the uniqueness of life while we have it, because there is a lot more Holy Saturday in life than we care to think about. Celebrate the end of that uniqueness too, because it defines how we choose to live in the face of death. Do not go gently into that good night...

Easter Sunday, April 9

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

How fitting that on this day of new beginnings, we are presented with the beautiful words of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Truly from the beginning as God created, and continues to create all that is, we are knit together with God throughout time with a love so generous and so abundant that God endeavored to become human so we might see and experience a relationship with God that transcends time as we know it. This love presents us with possibilities we would never know otherwise.

However, just as Jesus is God incarnate, our relationship with God is also meant to be incarnate, lived out in the real world. Several years ago I attended a conference in which one of the speakers was Bishop Robert Hirschfield, the Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire and he talked about a picture he had on his desk called the *Cristos de Pieta* by Renaissance painter Andrea del Sarto.

In the picture Jesus is sitting up in his tomb, having just awoken, and is staring down at the nail marks in his hands. And Bishop Hirschfield said he imagined Jesus thinking, "Do I have to go through that again?"

But the voice of God spoke to him and said, "No, that is done. Get up and leave the tomb. It's a beautiful world out there."

Indeed, our salvation in the birth, death, and resurrection in Jesus is complete. And if that was the end of the story, it would be enough. But it's not the end of the story. It is the beginning—the beginning of many beginnings.

Each one of us represents a beginning and a telling of God's story of love and redemption made possible in Jesus. We are all part of an all-embracing vision in which mercy, justice, kindness, compassion, and love, prevail over doubt, fear, and confusion.

To which God then says to each of us, "Go with Jesus. Get up and leave the tomb. It's a beautiful world out there."

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

Contributors

40 DAYS



LENT

February 22: Richard Hogue
February 23: Peter Bolland
February 24: Peter Del Nagro
February 25: Deborah Kistler
February 26: Thomas Wilson
February 27: Christopher Atwood
February 28: Jacqueline FitzGibbon
March 1: ChatGPT
March 2: Elizabeth Fitzsimons
March 3: Blair Shamel
March 4: Diane Lopez Hughes
March 5: Penny Bridges
March 6: Darien DeLorenzo
March 7: David Spencer
March 8: Stacey Klaman
March 9: Carolyn Lief
March 10: Jane Batarseh
March 11: John Will
March 12: Richard Lief
March 13: Robert Heylmun
March 14: Cherie Dean
March 15: Kimberly Fernandez
March 16: ChatGPT
March 17: Phil Petrie
March 18: William Eadie
March 19: Vesta Kowalski
March 20: Rachel Ambasing
March 21: Cindy Schuricht
March 22: Calvin Johnson
March 23: Konnie Dadmun

March 24: Mary Bowman
March 25: Frank Borik
March 26: Andrew Green
March 27: Lisa Churchill
March 28: Susan Jester
March 29: Mark Lester
March 30: John Koenig
March 31: Ellen Hargus
April 1: Dean Hall
April 2: William Crespo
April 3: Justin Lewis
April 4: Rocky Ewell
April 5: Stephanie Pierce
April 6: Rachel Kopel
April 7: Thomas Wilson
April 8: Richard Hogue Jr.
April 9: Allisyn Thomas

Edited by: Calvin Johnson, Vesta Kowalski, & Richard Hogue

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent – February 22 – April 9