

40 DAYS



LENT

February 14 – March 31, 2024



ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL
EPISCOPAL

Love Christ • Serve Others • Welcome All

A note from an editor:

I want to thank all our contributors and editors for this year's Lenten reflection booklet! This was the fastest this has come together in my time here, and it's a good thing too, since Ash Wednesday snuck up on us all so early this year. And more importantly, the depth of reflections conveys that those writing continue to hone their meditative abilities, those who are veterans and our newest writers. While I am especially grateful to those who wrote more than two reflections, I hope we can encourage some new folks to join in for Lent 2025's booklet to spread the love and new perspectives around even more.

I'm doubly grateful for the thorough and swift editing skills of Rev. Vesta Kowalski and Calvin Johnson, without whom this booklet would have taken much, much longer for me to go it alone. This whole thing is a labor of love for so many in our community and it's fantastic.

If you wish to see who wrote what, please check page 50 for each author. Following that is the Lenten, Holy Week, and Triduum schedule.

A final note, all of the readings for the reflections are from the two-year daily lectionary cycle rather than eucharistic readings, of which these are pulled from year two.

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

~Rev. Cn. Richard Hogue

Ash Wednesday, February 14

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

Once the ashes are on the forehead, what is left? This blackened substance is a reminder that time is short, that we stand in a thin space. Our hearts beat, our lungs breathe, we form words with our mouths, we create with our hands, and explore inner depths with our minds. All of this will be ash.

Luke's parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector may not be about ashes, but it is about what we do before we become them. We scoff at the Pharisee as a sanctimonious hypocrite, sympathizing with the tax collector for his humility and repentance. We say, "Thank God I am not like that Pharisee!" But that defeats the purpose of the text. It ignores the good the Pharisees did in their communities through works and tithing. We minimize the traitorous harm tax collectors did in their oppressed community, taking money from the poor to give to the Roman Empire to maintain its colonizing militarism. We forget that to even be present inside the Temple, both persons would have been ritually cleansed. We forget that Pharisee would have been seen as the good guy in their time. Jesus was among the Pharisees: he wore their clothes, spoke their language, participated in their rituals, and functioned as one of them. Ever wonder why they were always nearby to be argued with?

Verse 14 is the hinge of this parable, commonly translated like so: "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified *rather* than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." Instead, it can just as easily be translated from Greek like so: "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified *alongside* the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted." They both walk up to the Holy Mount, ritually purify, pray, give thanks for life, and both descend back down into the rest of their lives. The Pharisee still does good deeds, and the truly repentant tax collector gives up his support of oppression and returns to full covenantal relationship with his community and God. Their righteousness—or lack of it—is not in what is spoken, but in what is done.

Actions will always speak louder than words, and they tell the true story of who we are. What we live into this Lent will tell the story of what we are becoming in God's true light. After the ashes, what is left?

Thursday, February 15

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

Habakkuk, the poet-prophet, envisions a cosmic retribution for those who rule Israel. His God marches forth from Mt. Sinai in his chariot of victory. Pestilence precedes him and plague follows. In his anger he cleaves the earth, makes the mountains writhe, pierces enemies with his glittering sword, and causes the sun to stand still. Habakkuk believes his cause is necessary and just, as do most nations who hope for victory over their enemies. But at what cost? How much collateral damage is acceptable? The Roman historian Tacitus mocks victors, who “create desolation and call it peace: *Ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.*”

Such a peace compromised by a violent, unjustified death looms over John’s account of Jesus’s last night with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus, like Habakkuk, has suffered indignities. Yet, in obedience to his Father, Jesus loves and forgives his enemies, although they will shortly arrest and kill him. Jesus, “of one spirit with the Father,” embodies the Divine that lovingly honors the onus of crucifixion. “Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee.” The Son reciprocates by his resurrection.

Our compassionate God sustains us as well in crisis. Yet surely it is our responsibility to intercede on God’s behalf for little children. Habakkuk’s images assume a ghastly reality for a child caught in war. The earth is cleaved by bombs, bodies are pieced by shrapnel, and the sun is obliterated by the chaos of fire, smoke and collapsing structures. Recently, UNICEF characterized child casualties in Gaza as “a growing stain on our collective conscience,” with one million children maimed and another ten thousand killed by bombing. Jesus also was once a child living under Roman military occupation. He preached a radical doctrine of love for which he died an ignominious death on a cross among common criminals. He rose again, God among us, as a reminder that each child is a potential peacemaker.

Friday, February 16

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

Philippians 4: 4-7: *Rejoice in the Lord always again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippian 4 was written by Paul to two women disciples, Euodia and Syntyche. There seemed to be a disagreement between them; about what, we do not know, but Paul called out his other companions to respect and honor the gentleness of these women for their work of sharing the Good News. This passage speaks to the feminine heart of Christ's love "which surpasses all understanding." Rejoice in the Lord with thanksgiving. This is certainly the gift of Peace, and I am so grateful.

Saturday, February 17

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

Today's readings say three things to me: God is powerful. God is merciful. God is personal. Over the years, I have come to understand that somehow my personal relationship with God requires Jesus as an intercessor. The Gospel reading alludes to this (v.22): "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one". Romans 8:34 is more explicit: "Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us."

But I don't need an intercessor to have a personal relationship with God. I see God thorough all things. The cores of exploding stars that make our elements on earth. Our star, the sun that provides the energy that enables life. Humankind's ability to learn, reason, and love. I see God through all these things, and everything. All I have to do is look.

So, what's so special about Jesus? To me, it's all about the Two Commandments: Love God. Love others. Further down in the Gospel reading is that message: "so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." And: "I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

My takeaway is that Jesus came into the world to show us how much God loves us, and how we should do likewise unto each other. Honestly, when I look into the eyes of my cat, I see a beautiful creature of nature and God, but I don't see Jesus. I see Jesus when I look into the eyes of a person – any person. The Christ that is in others. Everyone.

I'm not so sure I need an intercessor. The word "intercessor" does not appear anywhere in the Gospels. My relationship with God, the world, and others, can be personal and direct, as I believe it is. But I do need Jesus to show me how to be in those relationships with love.

Sunday, February 18

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

At the Ash Wednesday service, we were invited to keep a holy Lent by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. Let us see how today's readings carry on this message.

Then I turned to the Lord God to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession (Dan 9:3-4). Fasting provides an opportunity to discover what is essential for us to love God above all, and our neighbors as ourselves. Prayer provides a chance to talk with and to listen to God, deepening our relationship with the source of all love. In confession, we acknowledge our shortcomings and renew our commitment to live our baptismal vows more fully. May we turn ever more fully toward God during Lent.

It was fitting that God for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation (Jesus) perfect through sufferings (Heb 2:10). Jesus calls us to pick up our cross and follow him. We know that following Jesus requires us to live in a broken world as broken human beings. But we also know that how we face these twists and turns of life, is a witness to our faith in God. With Jesus as our role model, may Lent lead us to live as wounded healers, being role models for one another.

I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness (John 12:46.) Our Lenten practices can shine light into the darker corners of our life, providing us with opportunities to refocus our thoughts and actions. By walking in the light of Christ, we see more clearly how we are called to live with courageous love. May this season of Lent bring light into our lives and may we share that light with everyone we meet.

Monday, February 19

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

Gen. 37 takes us into the “Joseph novella.” Joseph’s brothers hated him, in part because Joseph was a tattletale who told on his brothers to their father, Jacob. Also, Jacob favored Joseph and made him a stylish tunic. In what can be attributed to either arrogance or naivete, Joseph told his brothers about his dreams. The first dream, where their sheaves of wheat bow down to his, made the brothers hate Joseph even more. The second dream, where the sun, the moon, and eleven stars also bowed down to him, made the brothers jealous.

Because of his dreams, Joseph was brought into Egypt at the tender age of seventeen and put to work as a servant. From this lowly position, and as a result of dreams, he eventually rose to a position of power and authority, making an invaluable contribution to his adopted homeland. But Joseph himself could not know what would come of his journey into Egypt, neither for himself nor for his descendants. Even if he had known, there was nothing he could have done about it, for the journey was not of his own volition.

I often think about the migrant surges along the U.S./Mexico border. How many people are dreamers whose journeys in some ways mirror those of Joseph? Traveling to this country as children, not of their own will, they have made or are trying to make the United States their home. And like Joseph, they do not yet know the invaluable contributions they might be able to make to our country and they may never be given a chance to find out.

The Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament remind us to be good to the strangers in our midst. If we don’t know what it is to be strangers in a strange land, surely, for most of us, our ancestors did. May Joseph’s journey inspire in us a sense of empathy and a sense of justice for those who find themselves strangers among us.

Tuesday, February 20

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

Today's readings offer a theme that weaves through a commissioning of sorts. In the true manner of Hebrew Scripture, the Psalm celebrates the king who will impart "grace...equity...righteousness" to the world, and will be remembered for those virtues.

Genesis reminds us that dreamers like Joseph are also called by God. Despite the derision they may endure - even the possibility of being left for dead - it's those dreamers who mirror a vision through compassion and forgiveness which can ultimately lead us into a community of love.

In the reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul asserts that when we become fools for God, we attain a wisdom that reverses society's dependence on attainment of the material into the freedom of the spiritual strength of love.

Through Mark's Gospel Jesus calls us to be fishers of people as well, following him, following love, reimagining of our world where the tables are turned on power derived from greed; where kindness instead adds upon kindness, the poor and disenfranchised are heard, and God's good Earth is respected and renewed for all creation.

Aren't we commissioned as Episcopalians through our baptismal vows? Don't we share that role with others of all faiths who follow a way of love? In this diocesan Year of Leadership, may we resolve to be models that draw those around us in a spirit of grace and equity, compassionate vision, and love.

Wednesday, February 21

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

In our Psalm passage for today we hear the words “the law” in nearly every verse. At this point in our Biblical history the author believes that the law will bring salvation. He is *so* earnest, yearning to know the Lord through his word and law. He comes with humility, knowing only God can help him keep God’s law.

In the New Testament Jesus says that He is the Spirit and the truth, and the fulfillment of the law. He is the One who heals the separation from God we feel because we do not live in God’s law and Spirit.

I Corinthians 2:12 tells us that we have received the Spirit that is from God. But we know only too well the *human spirit* (v. 11), that is estranged from the God for whom we long. We grieve.

Jesus brings healing to two people in Mark’s gospel. Healing is hard work, even for Jesus, so he goes out to a deserted place to pray. Lent can be our deserted place. Maybe you would like to create a special place of prayer. Maybe fasting gets you in touch with your longing. Pray for the humility and earnestness of the Psalmist to seek to know God and God’s will. The Lord will bear our grief and heal our infirmities.

May we come to Easter renewed and refreshed from our Lenten desert, rejoicing in the power of God’s Spirit.

Thursday, February 22

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

When I first read today's assignment a few weeks ago, I was going to write a very different reflection. But since the loss of my loving kitty, Luna, the readings have created a very different reflection: how to overcome pain and suffering while maintaining my faith.

Genesis 39 is about the story of Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers. How he must have suffered. The story ends with his suffering by being placed in prison for a crime he didn't commit. Is suffering part of God's perfect plans for us?

Our reading from 1 Corinthians talks about the development of our faith. We simply can't survive on baby food but must grow in our faith so that we can have the strength to endure the struggles that lie ahead. Is suffering part of God's perfect plan for us?

And finally, Mark tells us the story of Jesus healing the paralytic who was unable to get past the crowd to be healed. How he must have suffered. But his friends loved him enough to climb on the roof to lower him to Christ, where he was healed. Suffering was overcome because of the love of his friends and community. Is suffering part of God's perfect plan for us?

And with that I close thanking all of you who have been supporting me through my suffering. And I am assured that when this suffering leaves, I will have grown stronger through Christ. Because SUFFERING IS PART OF GOD'S PERFECT PLAN FOR US!

Friday, February 23

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

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul—the Pharisaic Jew and recent convert to the early Jesus Movement—draws on his own mystical experience to argue for the theological position of God’s immanence. No longer content to think of God solely as a transcendent entity above and outside the phenomenal world, Paul exhorts his fellow Jesus followers to have *metanoia*—new mind—about the nature and whereabouts of divinity. “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in you?”

The Temple in Jerusalem had for centuries been the center of Jewish life. To usurp the Temple’s sole status as the contact point between heaven and earth, and to instead place that contact point within the core of our temporal forms, was a radical claim. “For God’s temple is holy,” he adds, “and you are that temple.” The fact that the Temple would be razed by the Romans a few years later makes the image all the more poignant.

Yet Paul cautions against a likely misunderstanding of this claim. Rather than elevating our status, this divine immanence within us only serves to remind us of how little we understand; of how incomprehensibly vast our mysterious essence is. Any so-called wisdom or greatness arising within us is not of our own making. In Paul’s portrait, we are to embody humility while simultaneously embracing the reality that in our alignment with God-consciousness we are limitless.

In the ancient wisdom texts of India, a similar claim is made, that when we realize our sacred nature as *Brahman-Atman*, we experience *Sat-Chit-Ananda*—Boundless Being, Boundless Consciousness, and Boundless Bliss. So often the world’s mystics and wisdom teachers teach the same principles in variant imagery.

In the wineskins passage (Mark 2:21-22), Jesus builds a metaphor out of an everyday kitchen table item to make an indelible point—that the pliability of a container is as important as its contents. No matter how beautiful and transformative the wisdom, a rigid mind can neither receive nor contain it. It is our highest calling to re-new and re-form our consciousness. It is not a new world we need, but new minds (*metanoia*) with which to understand it.

Saturday, February 24

Genesis 41:1-13; Psalm 55; 1 Corinthians 4:1-7; Mark 2:23-3.6

I eat corn on Wednesdays. It is not something that I think about, it is just in the rotation. I buy it from the grocery store, and no one is concerned even if I buy it on a Sunday.

The author of Genesis tells a story about Pharaoh's dream where seven scanty ears of corn swallow seven ears of ripe corn. Certainly, an anxiety dream. He, who had all the power, was reminded of his failure.

Mark harkens back to this when he tells us a story where Jesus and his disciples are picking ears of corn because they were hungry. When questioned by the Pharisees about breaking the Sabbath he turned things around and said, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of the people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath." He went on to say, "So the Son of Man is Lord even over the Sabbath."

Jesus had the courage that Pharaoh did not. Jesus by his life, death and resurrection has given me the courage to live a life full of his love. During this Lent I will spread that love to others by deed and example. I also will continue to eat corn on Wednesdays.

Sunday, February 25

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

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Most of today's reading from Romans sounds more like Easter than Lent, and in fact the same reading does appear in the Eastertide lectionary. But hearing it in the context of our Lenten observance invites us to think about it in a different way—and perhaps also to think about Lent in a different way.

What might it mean to be “dead to sin and alive to God”? Many things to many people, of course, but here's one suggestion. What if, instead of focusing on our sins and sinfulness, a tradition that many follow during Lent, we instead focus on being fully alive to God? What if, in other words, we switch our focus from ourselves to God?

How might that happen? Since today's reading from Genesis is a part of the long “Joseph narrative,” let's look at Joseph as an example. Now Joseph was hardly an admirable person. As a teenager, he was so arrogant about his position as his father's favorite son, and so insensitive in exercising his God-given ability to interpret dreams, that he enraged his elder brothers to the point that they decided to kill him. He was only rescued from death by their marginally better decision to sell him into slavery to a band of traders who carried him off to Egypt.

Joseph could have spent some time repenting about being so annoying, but we're not told that he did that. He could have focused on how sorry his lot had become, but we're not told that he did that, either. What we are told is that Joseph continued to exercise that God-given ability to interpret dreams—whether he was in prison or serving in the household of a court official—until, as we read in today's passage, he comes to the attention of Pharaoh. This exercise of his gift led to his being put in charge of all of Egypt, which led to his being able to save his vengeful brothers and his loving father from famine, which led to the story of the Exodus and all that follows—including our being here as Christians today.

What gift has God given us that might be used to do some good in the world—even if we are less than perfect? Perhaps Lent is a perfect time to focus on the possibilities, to consider where we are most “alive to God.”

Monday, February 26

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

Mark describes an energized occasion with excitement and crowds of people from all around. Then we enter the more intimate group of his devoted followers who go with him up the mountain to a higher point. Each individual apostle is named, and we glimpse Jesus' love and enjoyment of them in his nickname for the two "sons of thunder." As they are commissioned to spread the gospel, we recognize the burden of that responsibility. They face a difficult task – even Peter, the "Rock," will betray him one night – and they will need to call on faith that God protects and blesses them in what they will endure.

After college I went to visit my parents, who were living in Copenhagen, Denmark for a year. One day my mother returned from a walk strangely excited and told me that she had had an amazing experience of light permeating the world. It was hard for her to articulate it, and I couldn't make sense of what she was saying. I don't believe I asked any question or even commented much beyond a puzzled expression. At that time my parents were in the retirement phase of their lives. My father's final illness was beginning to appear, and a little more than a year later he would die. Soon I decided to leave them to go back to the States for graduate school. It had to be a difficult time for my mother, who lived with humility and Christian faith throughout her life. Joseph's story in Genesis points out that times of abundance change to times of hardship, and in such a time, after her many years of faithfulness, God may have granted my mother a special grace. Decades later I looked back and realized how her experience brought to mind the mystical vision of Thomas Merton. Support can come to us when we prayerfully maintain relationship with God, who, the psalmist maintains, acts for justice and love – and knows each of our tears.

During Lent I want to turn on that spiritual channel of communication more often.

Tuesday, February 27

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

A long-time friend expressed to me vaccine hesitancy, basing her skepticism towards science and medicine upon her readings of non-scientist authors she admires. My response was to feel angry and betrayed: after all, *I* am a scientist and my wife is a scientist. We both have talent and experience in explaining how science works. Why not ask us? Why not trust us?

Outrage at betrayal burns hottest when it comes from those close to us. In Genesis, Joseph meets the brothers who sold him to strangers. Slavery abounded in the ancient world (and still is not yet stamped out today), and many hands trafficked Joseph and countless others. Yet unsurprisingly, Joseph's fury is reserved for his brothers, and he conjures a reason to imprison them, so they might taste what he once suffered.

A millennium later, Paul writes with hot anger to the fractious church in Corinth, flabbergasted they blithely tolerate a member who has taken up with his own stepmother. Paul is quite clear: the Corinthians should still minister to immoral people *outside* their congregation, the covetous and the grifters and the idolaters. But Paul feels let down and betrayed that the Church has not embraced a higher standard of morality for themselves.

In the gospel reading we meet Judas Iscariot, the arch-traitor of history, immediately before Jesus faces betrayal from His own people, from His family, and from Jewish scribes. The last group declare Jesus to be in league with demonic forces, an accusation still cast about today.

Unlike Paul or Joseph—or me—Jesus responds with love, stressing through parables a message of unity and forgiveness. The only thing unforgiveable is blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Theologians debate what Jesus means, but I wonder if He means the sowing of division. For in the next lines, Jesus is exhorted by His family of origin, His mother and brothers, to abandon His ministry. Jesus instead declares those sitting with Him to be His true family.

And so, reluctantly, I need to re-think and pray about who is sowing division in my life, who is betraying a friendship: my vaccine-hesitant friend, or me?

Wednesday, February 28

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

Abraham Lincoln once said, "I don't much like that man. I must get to know him better." Think about how much compassion a resolve like that took. It is the kind of compassion that is born of love, respect for another human being, and the deep knowledge that we are all the same and that our pride does not serve us.

Probably all of us have had someone in our lives who rubbed us the wrong way or even betrayed us. We are hurt by this person and they have to pay for the slight they brought to us. Our first thought might be getting even somehow or thinking about ways to belittle that person while we think that doing so will make us feel better and exonerate us. But exonerate us to whom? Ourselves, to the people we call our true friends? Or maybe we somehow would feel justified, even as we sit in church and hear the words of Jesus about forgiveness, forbearance, and rising above our own foolishness. In short, we sit there happy to be a hypocrite, feeling pretty good that we got even.

Lent gives us a time to think again about our relations with others, to examine ourselves and our motives, and above all, to take a look at our pride. Was it pride that drove Jesus to accept the cross? No, it was love, and we all know that. "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do." It is perhaps easy at this distance to underestimate the kind of agony a death on a Roman cross entails, but try anyway to imagine it. Then measure up your puny spite against that great sacrifice and see what you feel then. If it is shame, it ought to be shame for whatever you did in retaliation for the slight that you have magnified into something of great importance.

Now is the time to forgive that person, to talk to him or her and come to a place of peace. Now is the time to put that slight into perspective, to see it for what it was, and to erase it, forgive it, and join once more into the body of Christ whose Gospel is love and whose message is peace. Lent gives us that very opportunity. Use it.

Thursday, February 29

Genesis 42:29-38; Psalm 71; 1 Corinthians 6:12-30; Mark 4:21-34

In Mark's parable of the mustard seed, there's a contrast: look how small that mustard seed is but look how great God's kingdom has now become. It's even spread out over the whole earth.

But what if there's more to the mustard seed than its small size?

What if Jesus, who understood his mostly peasant audience quite well, knows that the mustard seed is sort of subversive? It grows where you don't plant it. In cracks. On poor soil. Even in fields between other crops that you do want to grow.

It's also tenacious and it's hard to get rid of.

So, what if God is like that too? Showing up where you didn't expect? Getting into parts of your life you were trying to keep private or out of sight? Starting some new growth where you weren't looking for it?

With the promise of Spring coming, where is new life appearing in your life? It could be God. If it is, go with it. Water that seed and watch it grow.

Friday, March 1

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

The level of detail in the Bible is amazing. There are intimate conversations in which people express their innermost thoughts and fears, whether it's David's metaphorical deep waters or the disciples' literal furious squall. David's eyes failed looking for his God. The disciples found Jesus asleep in the stern, seemingly unconcerned about their wellbeing. David prayed "Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink, deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters." Jesus did exactly that for the disciples, rebuking the wind and quieting the waters. God cares for our physical and mental state.

In Genesis, we have the story of Joseph in Egypt. His brothers, who had previously sold him, come looking for food due to the famine, not recognizing Joseph. When they left to return to their father Israel, Joseph planted stolen goods in their bags and held their brother Simeon hostage. In the Psalm, David says, "I am forced to restore what I did not steal". Judah and his brothers returned double the amount of silver that was placed in their sacks. Israel and Judah expressed their fear, and their depth of commitment and duty to one another, by entrusting Benjamin to Judah's charge, in the hope that Joseph would release Simeon and give them supplies. Father, sons, and brothers all contribute to this complicated exchange.

In St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he describes spousal duties in intimate terms.

God is concerned about our relationships, whether it be among siblings, parent-child, spouses or friends.

Saturday, March 2

Genesis 43:16-34; Psalm 87; 1 Corinthians 7:10-24; Mark 5:1-20

We have been in Lent now for over two weeks. I'm not sure what your Lenten discipline is regarding reading the reflections put together by the St. Paul's people. I would suggest that you read each of the readings daily so that you do not start learning about a Bible segment out of context. You would not want to read a mystery by choosing one chapter in the middle of the book and let that be all you know about the entire book.

I have chosen to reflect on the Genesis reading. It is about Joseph, and it is important for you to know that Joseph was greatly mistreated by his brothers because he was his father's favorite child. His father, Jacob, gave him the colorful coat. The brothers sold Joseph into slavery, and he used his powers of interpreting dreams and saved the Egyptian people from dying in famine because they stockpiled food. Joseph's brothers came to buy food so they would not starve. They did not recognize him.

In the portion of Genesis today we learn about how Joseph trusted God's plan. Joseph also was overcome when he saw the youngest son, Benjamin, so much so that he went away from the group and wept. He wasn't sure if the brothers would be jealous of Benjamin and Benjamin was served five times as much food as the other brothers. The brothers didn't show jealousy. All of them feasted and drank freely.

Joseph forgave his brothers and was not bitter to them. This is not always easy to do. I doubt many of us have been put into slavery by our brothers, but many have suffered acts of that magnitude. We all have someone we can forgive. Whatever the seriousness of the act to us by someone, if we suffer, we need to forgive. We learned in this chapter that God loves humans and interacts with us.

As you continue your Lenten journey, remember to forgive and that God loves you.

Sunday, March 3

Genesis 44:1-17; Psalm 93; Romans 8:1-10; John 5:24-29

I am Resurrection and I am Life, says the Lord.

Whoever has faith in me shall have life.

These familiar words from the Burial of the Dead, found in the Book of Common Prayer, are the call of Christ to us during this holy season of Lent. We are to recall promises made at our baptism to love the Lord with all our heart, body, mind and soul. We are to seek Christ in all persons.

Preceding our gospel reading is verse 5:24: Jesus says, “This is the truth I tell you, the one who listens to my word, and believes on him who sent me, has eternal life, and is not on the way to judgment, but has crossed from death to life.”

We are called to live our lives in the light of Christ, abiding in him and he in us. We are called to walk into this broken and sinful world in the power of the Spirit, in the spirit of sacrificial love, just as Christ gives himself for us. We are to abide in him and he in us.

We are heart-broken when we experience the sufferings and disasters of our war-worn world. We are heart-broken when we feel helpless in the midst of it all and wonder whether our individual and corporate efforts can make any difference. We are heart-broken over our many and ongoing mistakes instead of following the Lord of life.

At the Good Friday Liturgy, a large wooden cross is carried down the main aisle of the cathedral, reminding us that it is Christ, by his death and resurrection, who takes away our sin and the sin of the world.

I am Resurrection and I am Life, says the Lord.

Whoever has faith in me shall have life.

Monday, March 4

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

“For the present form of this world is passing away.” (Mark 5:31)

I came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which was a heyday for dystopian films. Either because of that or the omnipresent threat of WW3, I expected to see some sort of societal collapse in my lifetime. That hasn't exactly happened, at least not yet. What has happened, as so often works out with history, is stranger. I would argue that despite its flaws, America at mid-century was a “reasonable” civilization which tried to use reason to figure things out, including our mistakes (Vietnam) and how we might improve and expand the franchise to people of color, women, gays, etc. I know that I am arguing this from a position of white male privilege and that if you were a person of one of those groups above (yes, the majority of the country!!), you would likely see things differently—but I still think I have something here. For me, this reasonableness is epitomized by the Life Nature and Science books (if you lived through this period, I think you will know what I am talking about). These books were based on science and still hopeful about the future and what human beings were capable of. Their very existence seemed to imply that a consensus about what was important was possible.

That world has passed away, I think chiefly due to three things: the unchained desire for new goods that late capitalism fosters; media's fetishization of thrills—sex, violence, or whatever gets our attention; and information/entertainment packaged in increasingly smaller bites. None of this is good for thinking critically, for using our reason. Paul urges the fledgling Christian community in Corinth to specific behaviors in the face of what he sees as the approaching end times. I would say that we must face our times by resisting these three aspects of our culture in whatever way makes the most sense to us. And it may seem strange to argue this in a Lenten devotional, but I think we should cling to Reason and try always to be reasonable. One more thing—OK, actually the most important thing. Just a little later on in 1st Corinthians Paul gives what my Bible calls his “hymn to love.” Love turns out to be the one essential thing, so surely our reason too must be guided by love. Maybe then this time also will pass and a better time emerge from it.

Tuesday March 5

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

Prophecy is a symbol of wisdom in the Bible, listed among the five spiritual gifts in Ecclesiastes. Prophets have driven many of the most powerful stories from biblical times to today. It is of key importance in today's Old Testament and Gospel readings.

Joseph had dreams and prophecies beginning as a child. His dreams were seen as prophecies of his leadership over his brothers. They sold him into slavery under the Pharaoh of Egypt. His prophetic interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams helped elevate him to Lord of the House of Pharaoh and to his being reunited with his brothers. Joseph prophesies to his brothers that there will be five years of famine ahead. They must move with their father Jacob from their home in Canaan to Goshen in northwest Egypt. This led to the exodus of the Israelite people into the land of Egypt and saving the Jews from starvation. Both Jacob and Joseph had to leave their home in Canaan to fulfill Joseph's prophecies.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus returned to his home synagogue to preach and prophecy. The pride of the local people and priests prevented them from honoring Jesus' words. *"Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor EXCEPT in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.' He was amazed at their lack of faith."* Even Jesus could not get his hometown family and friends to accept his prophecies.

Do we have prophets among us? I believe we have many. Their prophecies might not align with our own experience and thinking. Are we too arrogant to accept what they have to say? Do we close our ears to their words because they do not line up with our long-held beliefs? Do we instead listen to false prophets in the vast "media-sphere" that bombards us with information that mostly reinforces our prejudices? What would happen if we opened our ears to listen to what others are saying and better understand why they feel the way they do. We might learn something! Who are the prophets among us?

Wednesday, March 6

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

The story of the beheading of John the Baptist is one that has captivated people through the centuries. It has the quality of a salacious gossip story wrapped in tragedy. It also shines a light on some of our own behaviors.

In Mark's telling, John the Baptist has been imprisoned for criticizing King Herod about his recent marriage to Herod's sister-in-law, Herodias, which was illegal. She was more than unhappy with John, wanting to have him killed, but Herod would not do it. It's said that Herod liked to listen to John, who must have been a dynamic speaker, preacher, prophet, someone who was bold enough to challenge a King. How have you challenged authority, called out someone for bad behavior, or stood up for what was right?

At Herod's birthday extravaganza, his stepdaughter, Salome, did a special dance, which so enamored Herod that he offered her whatever she wanted, up to "half his kingdom". Instead of making her own wish, she went directly to her mother, Herodias, who told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. How has someone influenced your opportunities? What did you lose in that transfer of your opportunity? How would you do things differently and retain your voice instead?

Herod is uncomfortable with the request and wants no part of it, but he needs to save face with the VIP guests and could not refuse Salome. How has peer pressure changed your mind or influenced your decisions? Do you regret making decisions against your better judgment or personal wishes? Have you ever been manipulated into actions that you regret?

Ultimately, Herodias' machinations were successful. Salome relinquished her hard-earned prize to her mother's macabre request. Herod's failure was in not staying true to his own wishes. Salome's failure was in her lack of independent thinking. When have you failed your own wishes or independent thinking?

As we progress through this Lenten season, be mindful of what influence people have in our lives, what their ultimate motives are, and how you can walk in the light of your moral compass both with God's and Jesus' help, and with your own fortitude.

Thursday March 7

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

*“As the deer longs for running streams,
so longs my soul for you, O God”. Psalm 42:1*

Sitting in church this morning, as Penny was speaking the prayers of communion, I had this thought: That I would be really upset if there isn't something after death, some heaven, something. And I realized that my soul IS longing for God, longing for something!

When Elner Shimfissle climbed a ladder to pick figs from the fig tree in her front yard and was attacked by a swarm of wasps, she fell to the ground and was declared dead. She was placed in a dark back room of the local hospital. In the meanwhile, author Fanny Flagg, in the book *Can't Wait to Get to Heaven*, tells of Elner's experiences on the "other side". Elner found herself in old neighborhoods with old friends and relatives and had pleasant conversations with them and even met her favorite movie celebrity, Ginger Rogers. However, eventually she was called to the "maker's" office where she was told she had to return, because her demise was premature. Elner regretfully returned to her life that she didn't hate, a whole lot wiser.

What's this got to do with Lent, you may ask? It has to do with our desires to meet our "maker", someday. I find it an interesting meditation, and Lent is the acceptable time for us to contemplate the running streams and the possibilities of heaven. If nothing else, Christ, in his existence, wanted us to know that He was there for us. All we had to do was love as He directed, and we would be with Him eternally. It's all about the love.

Friday, March 8

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

Have you ever wondered where God was during your darkest moments? Even Christ cried this out on the cross during his agony. Psalm 88 also reflects despair from a soul who really lashes out at God for not being there when needed the most. It portrays a very human reaction to question God's existence at times, especially during our most vulnerable moments in life.

The passage from Genesis shows reliance on family to get through horrific times, which is what God expects would happen. Through a support network, God is present and works to provide us with strength to persevere.

Corinthians teaches us that Paul felt compelled to preach the Word of God, that it was his duty to do so through self-discipline, at any cost.

Finally, the impactful "walking on water" reading from Mark emphasizes the importance of the disciples not to lose faith in Jesus even when things seemed to be impossible. As Jesus is praying on the mountainside, the fishermen are having the worst time in their boat, battling a storm, trying to catch their fish. But when Jesus comes down from the mountain, walks across the water to the boat, the storm calms but the disciples are completely freaked out at what they witnessed, later to be calmed and reassured that through Jesus' love and compassion, all will be OK.

Through these readings, are we to connect the dots to somehow form some sort of relationship among them? As Episcopalians, we can try to make some semblance from the Word of God to create a parallel between the Word and our lives, seeking respite from these teachings, which is part of God's plan according to Scripture. Life's pains will pass, and we will be comforted by the providence of God. In turn, should we not live as God would want us to. and preach the Word of Jesus at any cost?

What we can all reflect upon during this Lenten season is that love is the presence of Christ interwoven throughout all of us, and that His death and resurrection are the fabric of who we are as Christians, giving us comfort and peace.

Saturday, March 9

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

Not so very many years ago, a cousin of whom I am quite fond asked me, “How can you otherwise be so intelligent and still believe in God?” Somewhat earlier in my life (we were both in our 70s at this point), I might have bristled at the question or struggled with the answer, but when he asked the question, the answer was immediately clear to me. I responded, “You’re really asking me how I can believe in the kind of God you think I believe in. I don’t.”

Like many of us, including me, he grew up with a picture of God painted by, in this case, midwestern Presbyterians, but it’s a common picture—the “old guy in the sky” who looks down on us disapprovingly, looking for things to criticize, unhappy if we have any fun. It’s the God of religion—a particular kind of religion, to be sure, but most religions have the same problem, the one Jesus names in today’s reading from Mark. “You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”

It’s worse than ironic that Jesus, who consistently preached that acting with love toward our fellow human beings is far more important than following a set of rules, should have his name connected with a religion that has in many times and places and ways destroyed untold numbers of human beings under the influence of a set of rules. And still does.

We at the cathedral try to be different. Our “welcome all” mission statement really means “all.” But individually, this openness to all our fellow human beings—living up to Jesus’ suggestion that we should love them all and serve them all—does not necessarily come naturally. It seems to be part of the human condition to want some rules, some standards, by which we can measure others and figure out whether God (by which, of course, we mean ourselves) can approve of them.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of nurturing a relationship with a God who is truly big enough to be God is letting go of our need for rules, our yearning for praise from the “old guy in the sky.” But as Jesus said over and over again in so many ways, love is much better than rules, much better than praise, and loving our fellow human beings is much more rewarding than hoping that God thinks that we are better than they are.

Sunday, March 10

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

Many years ago journalist Sara Miles walked into St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. She was a dedicated non-church goer but for reasons known only to God, she felt drawn to enter that beautiful and stately church. It just so “happened” to be right before a mid-week Eucharist.

As she later described in her book, *Take this Bread: A Radical Conversion*, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, she took a seat in the back. But at the invitation to communion, she found herself walking forward to receive the bread and wine made holy, and upon receiving it, tears streamed down her face.

From that inexplicable moment the focus and purpose of Sara’s life changed in ways she could never have foreseen, including founding The Food Pantry, a ministry of St. Gregory’s that to this day continues to serve over 400 families weekly.

Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” But as he later makes clear, we are fed not just to be sated, but like him, to feed others in all the myriad of ways possible. Jesus’ words are not just an invitation but actually an expectation of all of us who are fed at God’s table.

During this holy season of Lent, we are all called to consider how our gifts, talents, and passions are to be used to feed God’s people and provide for God’s creation. Perhaps, like Sara, we are literally called to feed others, but regardless, we are to embrace our call and pray for the willingness and ability to follow it, even when we do not know where it may lead, trusting in God’s faithfulness.

Which, when we think of it, is the way of the Cross.

Monday, March 11

Genesis 49:1-28; Psalm 89:1-17; 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1; Mark 7:24-37

We read that Jesus was a healer, and that although he instructed those healed not to reveal it, they did. (Evangelism!) In my life, Jesus and God do heal through devotion, faith, and prayer. Anxieties, doubts, guilty conscience, general malaise are relieved through faith and prayer. Worry leaves me.

Jesus restored a person's hearing in the reading, and although I don't believe that is literally possible through prayer alone, certainly the negative emotions that accompany deafness are lessened and a positive, calm attitude toward healing is received through prayer and faith. I have experienced such healings for various problems through prayer. Jesus also removes a demon from a little girl. Demons are anxieties, perceived curses, blocks, nervousness, the devil, etc. A demon is a state of mind, also relieved, as Jesus teaches, through prayer, devotion, and humility. Prayer is an exhibition and practice of belief and faithfulness for me, and it manifests through the Holy Spirit.

Tuesday, March 12

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

In today's readings, I was most inspired by the passage in Corinthians. When we gather as a community, it is not simply enough that we consume the body and blood of Christ. We are commanded to share it with our brothers and sisters. It seems to be a lesson that I need to remind myself about. To remember that despite our differences, we are all children of God. Likewise, when we break bread together, we remember that we must share our good fortune with those who have less.

My husband Tom knows I like to occasionally put together jigsaw puzzles. So, for Christmas this year, one of the gifts he got me was a 1500-piece puzzle. It is a challenge. And while preparing my reflection, I thought about the puzzle and how the pieces represent humanity. Different colors and shapes, etc. And when I look at some of the pieces, I have some doubt that they are part of the big picture. But as the puzzle comes together, I see how some of those strange pieces fit to give one complete picture.

So, as we go through this Lenten season, we can remind ourselves that all people are a gift from God. We are different colors, personalities, ages, sexual orientation, etc. It is up to us to take our blinders off and truly appreciate that. I know it's easier said than done. That is the challenge before us.

Wednesday, March 13

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

For a while I was puzzled as to how these readings could be pulled together, and then I realized that they can all be interpreted through Jesus's own words in the Lord's prayer.

Many great resolutions; maybe with God's help it's possible to keep them. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.

Treat others as you would like them to treat you. Don't bear a grudge. Be kind. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

We all have a gift of the Spirit, all different, all equally valuable. This is our daily bread.

Trust in the Lord. Believe. Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil.

Thursday, March 14

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

Psalm 69:32-33 is good news for anyone who is dealing with lack. We can be poor and needy in many ways; financially, physically, socially, spiritually, or emotionally. The Good News is that Jesus can heal us everywhere we hurt. Jesus says in John 16:24, “Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”

Seek God for any need you have. Don’t just try to fix the situation yourself or run to other people for help; go to God. Go to the source of all good things. Your prayer is powerful, even if you have not done everything right. When we pray, God answers us without reproach or faultfinding. God understands our weaknesses, and we can go boldly to the throne of grace and receive help in plenty of time to meet our need.

God has a special place in the heart for the poor and needy, and the Lord will hear and answer you. God even promises that you will see victory and be glad. Stay full of hope and expectation, because the Lord has heard your prayer, and your answer is on the way.

I am so thankful that God cares for the poor and needy and the goodness that love is for everyone. Let heaven and earth praise the Lord!

Friday, March 15

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

Why is lamentation such a close companion of holiness? How do sorrow, despair, and hopelessness pave the road to awakening? Perhaps it is only in extreme loss, that is to say powerlessness—when all of our own resources are utterly depleted—that we truly realize we stand on a bedrock foundation *not* of our own making.

Nearly two-thirds of the psalms are laments, and today's reading is no exception. "My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread...I eat ashes...and mingle my tears with my drink...My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass." And I thought *I* was melancholic.

The origin story of Moses reminds us that it is only out of suffering that freedom arises. Something must end for new forms to arise. Our hero is born from the systemic injustice of human enslavement, and after an act of violence he must flee, only to return years later when he finally musters the courage to answer the call to dismantle the very system that birthed him. In this archetypal hero's journey Moses is all of us—the one who thinks they aren't good enough. We recognize his reluctance as our own. But as the saying goes, "God doesn't call the qualified—he qualifies the called." It is by answering the call that we are made ready for the work ahead. We do not know the way. We make the path by walking.

Struggle is what makes the world, and ourselves, ready for what is next. Birth is messy. There will be blood and crying. By their very nature, the emergence of new forms alters or destroys the past.

But as Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthians, there is a right way and a wrong way to take action in this world of sorrow, destruction, and rebirth. As Krishna told Arjuna in chapter 3 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, when you perform the work of your sacred duty, without selfish attachments to outcomes, you are performing the work of God. Or in the St. Francis Prayer, in sacred surrender you become an instrument of God's will. "Now you are the body of Christ," Paul writes, "and individually members of it." None of our aspirations or intentions bear fruit unless rooted in the consciousness of love. Love is the only thing that lasts after all forms fade away.

Saturday, March 16

Exodos 2:23-3:15; Psalm 107:33-43; 1 Corinthains 13:1-13; Mark 9:14-29

In this familiar story Moses is out beyond the wilderness taking care of the flock that belongs to his father-in-law. It seems like it's a typical solitary day for Moses. The Bible passage doesn't mention the size of the flock, but I imagine the noise of those animals would be quite loud. Moses happens upon a flaming bush, but the fire isn't damaging the leaves or branches.

Moses now does what a shepherd would never do. He takes his eyes off the sheep and keeps staring at the bush. God is ecstatic that Moses notices that this burning bush is a true miracle. God speaks in a voice that is louder than the noise of all those animals. "Moses! Moses!" Moses' answer is: "Here I am." This voice tells Moses that Moses is now in the true presence of God. God explains that the task He is setting for Moses is to free all the captive Israelites from the Egyptian pharaoh.

You probably know the rest of the story of the plagues and the Red Sea and then freedom. Has anyone reading this reflection heard the voice of God? Have you heard a booming voice like the voice Moses heard? Have you heard a small quiet voice? Have you just felt the voice in your heart? Have you heard a line of a psalm read at morning prayer? Have you heard a phrase of a sermon that you can't get out of your mind? Have you heard a hymn rumbling around in your head?

Here is a true story. I was living in Florence, Oregon, about thirty-five years ago. Out of nowhere I heard a loud booming male voice say: "JOANNA! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? GO HOME!" I pondered these words for two weeks, gave notice to my job, came home, and could then take care of my mother. I know it was the voice of God that got me back to San Diego and especially got me back to St. Paul's, my childhood church. The voice of God was heard by men and women in the Bible. I know the voice of God is being heard all day long in 2024. Our challenge is to answer the voice with these words:

Here I am!

Sunday, March 17

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

So many today see differences as a threat to their power. Historically, those in power or wanting power used differences as an excuse to blame, isolate, and marginalize those believed to be inferior to them because they are different. Today, Christians have turned on Christians, demonizing them because they embrace diversity and value differences.

Jesus was different. He embraced diversity and engaged those different than him, meeting and engaging all on their own terms. Jesus was, and is, the embodiment of love and truth that existed before time began and will be till the end of the ages. The divine and cosmic truth that loves his neighbor, even if they are different. Jesus tells his detractors, “I am.” Jesus identifies who he is; it is a divine statement of presence, promise, and hope, meaning that he is with us now; he walks with us in every moment, embracing and holding us up forever.

Monday, March 18

Exodus 4:10-31; Psalm 31; 1 Corinthians 14:1-19; Mark 9:30-41

Recently I finished reading the Pentateuch; therefore, my reflection will focus on Exodus 4:10-31. Moses has been commissioned by God to bring Israel out of Egypt and Moses has difficulty in accepting this commission. Moses worries that he isn't the right spokesperson. He doesn't see himself as eloquent, a great statesman, or philosopher. Ultimately Moses' pleas are overruled, and all his excuses are answered. Moses still tries to convince God that he is not the right choice. God uses grace and kindness to balance Moses' objections by reminding him God will be with him. Further, he commissions Aaron to join Moses as one who can speak well. God found just the right person to work alongside Moses in Aaron.

This chapter reminded me of the importance of shared leadership. How often two or more can be better than one. Here God has two leaders to carry the message with different talents. Aaron, who could speak well, and Moses, with wisdom and heart for leading the Israelites out of Egypt, all with God's grace and direction.

In my own leadership experiences, I have also found that success comes from individuals with various talents coming together to solve difficult problems. It is important for a leader to ask for help and seek out the right expertise for assistance and be vulnerable enough to realize you have something to learn from others. Moses was incredibly brave. May we also be brave and seek individuals within our social network, all with God's help. One of my favorite prayers at times is a very simple prayer and plea: "Please help me."

Tuesday, March 19

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

Many of us wake up in the morning and worry about what the day will hold for us. We worry about tomorrow, next week, next month. Many times, we go to bed still worrying. Even in our sleep, our dreams are those of worry.

Worry... worry... worry. It can become a way of life! Today's meditation has a very simple theme – *don't* worry! This is easier said than done, of course, but when we have an issue that needs resolution, the Psalms never fail to be there for us. Take, for instance, Psalm 121:

“I’m worrying so much! Who will help me?” Our help comes from one place: the LORD. GOD will keep you steady. Afterall, GOD made *everything* and never sleeps! When the Psalm says the LORD is your keeper, your shade, your going out and your coming in, it is a plain and simple way to say, “*don't* worry.”

As you meditate and pray today, read the words of Psalm 121. Read them more than once, and while you read them, really listen to what GOD is saying. God is saying, “I’ve got you. Peace, be still.” Reflect on the Psalm, reflect on yourself, and reflect on what GOD is doing through you and for you, from now and forevermore.

In this moment, allow yourself to *not* worry. Let yourself be in the Presence of Jesus and feel his peace.

Wednesday, March 20

Exodus 7:8-24; Psalm 119:145-176; 2Corinthians 2:14-3:6; Mark 10:1-16

Sometimes we don't get what we'd like, and I certainly would have liked different readings to work with. However, since the readings deal with challenges to suppositions and belief, maybe it's not such a bad thing to have to delve into them.

The Psalms writer and Paul in 2 Corinthians are on the defensive, appealing for an end to persecution. The Psalmist pleads with God for protection, since he is a devoted rule follower. He asks God to pick on his adversaries, the faithless, "who do not keep your commands." Paul tries to justify his leadership to the early Christian community by casting his opponents as "peddlers of God's word" and pencil-pushers who need letters of recommendation. Paul offers the vision of Christ leading his audience to be ministers of a new covenant of the life-giving spirit.

In the passages from Exodus and Mark, "the law" is being challenged. First, in Exodus, Moses and Aaron perform two feats of magic at God's command, and are met with equal feats from Pharaoh's magicians, casting doubt on the power of God. The interesting thing in this reading is that we clearly see the losers: the people of Egypt, who, due to the showdown, have no drinking water. However, we know the scene is being set for the downfall of Pharaoh and the triumph of God and God's people as the Exodus unfolds.

Mark 10:1-12 raises the topic of divorce, which the passage shows has been thorny since ancient times. Unfortunately, it has been used in the church to oppress, divide worship communities, and keep believers from participating in the sacraments. I can't but look back up the page to 2 Corinthians, where Paul is chastising those who brandish the law as a weapon rather than living in the life-giving Spirit. Mark continues with the famous passage of Jesus blessing the children. What he says is, "It is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." Children were second-class, lacking status, therefore standing in their community. Jesus admonishes his followers to come to God simply as they are, by their own merit, not regarding status.

So, we come before God simply as we are, not putting others down to justify ourselves. In that, we share in community and in God's love.

Thursday, March 21

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

A wealthy young ruler approaches Jesus, yearning for eternal life. He boasts of obeying the commandments, expecting easy access to the kingdom. Yet, with love, Jesus challenges him: “You are lacking one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me” (Mark 10:21).

The response? Shock and grief. The riches that provide him security and societal status are the one attachment he is unwilling to abandon. This passage isn't just about material possessions; it's about priorities. What holds the highest place in our hearts?

Jesus' words, though seemingly harsh, reveal a profound truth: **true discipleship demands sacrifice for those in need.** It calls us to surrender not just possessions but attachments, ambitions, and anything hindering our following the path and being of service. The “eye of the needle” reflects the narrow path requiring radical commitment.

But Jesus doesn't leave us empty-handed. He promises “one hundred times as much now in this life... and in the coming age, eternal life” (Mark 10:30). The sacrifice is real, but the reward is immeasurable. We discover true belonging in a Christ-centered community as we abandon our earthly attachments.

The rich young ruler walked away. What about us? Will we cling to our comfort zones, or choose the challenging path? Remember, following Jesus is responding to a love that calls us to a deeper life of service. May we find the courage to let go and discover the true riches.

Friday, March 22

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

As we approach Holy Week, we focus on Jesus' suffering and death, then his glorious resurrection on Easter Day. Unfortunately, I've always had a problem with "resurrection." I haven't personally seen any ghosts, nor stuck my finger in Jesus' wounds. When I die, I die. There will be no more me. My heart will stop pumping and I will stop breathing, depriving my cells of the elements they need. I will eventually return to the dust.

Maybe there's another way of looking at it. From the dust springs life anew. Some of the chemicals I had stewardship over become other living things. Is this the resurrection I am looking for? As Ruth Awad beautifully writes:

Because if you can survive
the violet night, you can survive
the next, and the fig tree will ache
with sweetness for you in sunlight that arrives
first at your window, quietly pawing
even when you can't stand it,
and you'll heavy the whining floorboards
of the house you filled with animals
as hurt and lost as you, and the bearded irises will form
fully in their roots, their golden manes
swaying with the want of spring—
live, live, live, live!—
one day you'll put your hands in the earth
and understand an afterlife isn't promised,
but the spray of scorpion grass keeps growing,
and the dogs will sing their whole bodies
in praise of you, and the redbuds will lay
down their pink crowns, and the rivers
will set their stones and ribbons
at your door if only
you'll let the world
soften you with its touching.

Saturday, March 23

Exodus 10:21-11:8; Psalm 137:1-9; 2 Corinthians 4:13-18; Mark 10:46-52

There are none so blind as those who will not see.

Throughout the Bible, blindness is used as one of the most common metaphors for being ignorant of God's will—often by choice, as expressed in the saying above. And this way of speaking of knowledge in terms of vision, or light, is embedded in our contemporary language, too—just think of the word “enlightenment,” for instance.

It's interesting, then, that two of today's readings turn this idea on its head.

Pharaoh, stubbornly refusing to recognize God's power in any of the visible plagues with which Moses has tried to secure his people's freedom, finally is convinced by three days of total darkness—only to renege when light returns and he can once again see his own domain and his power in it and what he stands to lose by releasing this nation of slaves. “Enlightenment” comes in the dark, and willful blindness returns with the light.

By contrast, the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, hears that Jesus, whom he cannot see, is passing by. He recognizes God's power in Jesus in spite of his blindness, and Jesus responds to this “insight” by curing him. The “enlightenment” that penetrated the darkness of Bartimaeus' blindness led to the restoration of his physical sight.

On the eve of Holy Week, we are entering the darkest time of the liturgical year. Perhaps this would be a good time to ask ourselves what we might be choosing not to see.

Is God asking us to do something that we hide ourselves from with our many distractions and businesses?

Is there something about ourselves that we know we should want to change, but so far have chosen not to give ourselves the time to reflect on the darkness it brings to our lives?

As we walk into the darkness of Holy Week, perhaps this year, instead of being afraid of the dark, we might approach it as a time of possible enlightenment.

Palm Sunday, March 24

Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalms 24, 29; 1 Timothy 6:12-16; Luke 19:41-48

First the Parade, then the Tears.

We celebrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and today we will hear Mark's version in our worship. We are familiar with the crowd waving palms and the expectant shouts of "Hosanna." Luke's reading in this reflection tells us what happens next. In Luke, Jesus is met by the crowd with the palms as he crests the hill. Now the crowd is gone, and he looks across at the walled city and Temple about a mile away. And he weeps.

As Jesus looks, he reflects on the good news from God that was his message, and how the authorities rejected it. And he weeps. But he doesn't turn away. He takes his message to the symbolic heart of Jerusalem – the Temple.

After the dramatic cleansing of his Father's house, he settles in for days of teaching. Imagine that you were there with him. He didn't turn the temple into a giant lecture hall. He hung out with the folks who came to pray and reflect on the Scriptures. Back and forth they would ask questions and offer opinions. Imagine the possibilities.

What questions will you add to this conversation? Imagine that Jesus is curating the conversation, not sitting in the center as the expert or answer man. Imagine him turning towards you and asking you about your question in a way that makes you dig deeper. Jesus hears you.

Jesus heard each in that circle and they heard him. The reading says that they were spellbound.

We have no record of those last days teaching in the Temple. I wonder...

Monday, March 25

Lamentations 1:1-2,6-12; Psalm 51:1-20; 2 Corinthians 1:1-7; Mark 11:12-25

In these passages, Paul uses the Greek word *paraklesis*, which can be translated as “all comfort”. The implied meaning of this word is not soothing, easy comfort; rather it is more indicative of the comfort of security that develops from the inner strength and resilience as a result of facing hardships.

John refers to the Holy Spirit as our *Paraclete*, our comforter, and in his first epistle he refers to the Son of God as our *Paraclete*, who is also a source of our comfort. So, we can see that clearly in every aspect, God is our ultimate comforter.

The primary message of these passages is that God comforts those of us who believe, so that we, in turn, can reach out and comfort others, who may or may not have the gift of faith. In the midst of deep suffering, Paul received much comfort and consolation through the Holy Spirit. He then was able to offer this same peace and consolation to those he served through his ministry.

In our time today, the principle is the same as it was in Paul’s time: God’s gifts of comfort and solace are not just meant for us alone to draw on for strength and peace. They are also intended for us to share with others to whom we minister, so that they also can know the joy and peace we have been given through the Holy Spirit.

Just as we all suffer at times, so we also can receive the comfort and peace of the Holy Spirit, and just as we receive, so can we all give the gifts of comfort and solace to those who cross our path in need of this solace.

Friends, let’s remember to offer, in whatever ways we can, no matter how small, the comfort we have found in Christ to those we encounter in our journeys this year, as we live into our own personal Lenten season.

Tuesday, March 26

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

On February 19, 2012, I was baptized for the first time. I made a vow not only with words but with my heart, and needed to learn as much as I could about the Episcopal church's beliefs and the Bible. I have been taking classes, stepping forth when I felt called, praying, dreaming, listening, allowing myself to feel, accepting help from others, speaking up, becoming an ally, learning to trust that what is in my heart and/or head is valid, and so much more.

I have been able to strengthen my ability to see where, when, and why I acted, or chose not to at all, have done harm. Sometimes it is all I can do to acknowledge the wrong I have done that effects my relationship with God. Other times I am blessed by a community and the way they have helped me to understand how what I have done or not done has hurt so many others, and again separated not just me alone but us all from God.

"...rebelled against his word..." Lamentations 1:18

"We do not know." Mark 11:33

"We do not want you to be unaware..." 1 Corinthians 1:8

"O Lord, heal me..." Psalm 6:2

"...on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again." 1 Corinthians 1:10

In all the readings today, individuals have seen, acknowledged, begun to repent, prayed for God's forgiveness, and prayed for God's help. All have faith in our Lord and their love for each and every one of us.

I truly believe that God is always here with me. That I will never be given up on or deserted is becoming a fact in my life. This nourishes my faith to look at where I have fallen short, to acknowledge this to our loving God, to ask for forgiveness plus always help. With the faith that I am never alone, I continue to step back onto my path and continue on my journey.

Where can you gather nourishment to strengthen your own courage in seeing, acknowledging, turning, and asking for forgiveness in the areas you have fallen short on your own journey with our Lord? Do you have faith?

Wednesday, March 27

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

As I read these passages, I was filled with feelings of violence, wrath, and anger! These readings call upon the LORD to demolish the enemies of the one praying to GOD. The Psalmist says if only he had wings like a dove, he would fly far away and take shelter in the wilderness. In other words, he would flee from his troubles if he could, but he cannot do that, so what does he do? He calls upon the LORD to deliver him from his enemies!

I think a lot of us would like to pray to the Almighty and simply have all our adversities simply wiped away, including our human enemies. But then, we come to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Paul has a different take on how to handle those who cause us grief.

Instead of praying for GOD to strike them down, he calls on us to... *forgive*. Of all the things we Christians *must* do, forgiveness has got to be, in some cases, the hardest of all. We struggle to let things go that have caused us grief or harm. We do not want to continue to love those who have hurt us. This is human nature and overcoming that requires help – GOD's help.

GOD has given us his word, thankfully, to help us understand why we should forgive and let go. Paul says, "...[S]o now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by even worse grief. So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him."

Part of Jesus' fasting in the wilderness was overcoming the temptations set forth by Satan. We must also overcome the temptation of Satan. Again, Paul tells us why we forgive: "So that we may not be outwitted by Satan..."

By forgiving one another, as Paul teaches us, instead of holding on to the hurt and grief others may have caused us, we become closer to being true followers of Jesus.

Maundy Thursday, March 28

Lamentations 2:10-18; Psalm 102; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17, 11:27-32; Mark 14:12-13

From Mark: “On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, ‘Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, “The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?”’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.’ So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.”

Jesus must be sneaky. He’s been followed night and day for two years of ministry, but still managed to find time to surreptitiously arrange a banquet hall during the busiest season in Jerusalem, complete with rendezvous point and pass phrase, and he only tells two of the closest twelve disciples. Such stealth and shrewdness are usually reserved for spy novels, but here we have God incarnate doing it!

But that’s what God does often, to our chagrin. We want big and obvious. We want it spelled out in plain view. We want direct answers. And yet...

Jesus had been telling them the fate he faced the whole time, but none of it seemed to sink in. He said it plainly, in parables, and in secret. Yet everything that happened that first Maundy Thursday was still a distinct surprise to those closest to him.

We want big and obvious, but we often miss what is right in front of us. We get upset when God is sneaky, but that’s where some of the greatest transformations begin. What are the obvious things we might be missing this Holy Week? What are the ways God is sneaking in to change things for us forever? Perhaps we should all sit and pray with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, in whatever form that takes. Perhaps there we can begin to hear God’s sneaking footsteps and see what’s been in front of us all along.

Good Friday, March 29

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

Our lectionary places the 22nd Psalm here on Good Friday because the earliest gospels, Matthew and Mark, tell us that as Jesus hung dying on the cross, he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—the 22nd Psalm’s opening line. The Psalm goes on to lament the silence of God in the face of our collective suffering. Yet in the next paragraph we read the affirmation of God’s continual presence and ineffable holiness. So which is it? It is both/and. Such is the paradoxical nature of scripture.

If Jesus is fully God, then why does he cry out in fear and distress? The later gospel of Luke records Jesus’ last words as “Into thy hands I commend my spirit”—surely a more accepting and resigned tone. And in the final gospel, written decades after the first three, John has Jesus saying simply, “It is finished.” These sound less like the words of a terrified victim of violent execution and more like the words of a divine being who understood his essential role in the transformation and salvation of humanity.

If the forms of this world exist fleetingly, only to be broken and transformed, then Jesus’ death on the cross is the ultimate narrative of this immutable truth. Throughout the centuries theologians have quarreled about the meaning of Christ’s death on the cross. Was it to pay a ransom, to atone for our wretched sinfulness, as Peter claims? Or is Christ’s death on Good Friday a heartbreaking call to deepening compassion and the realization that in the universality of our suffering we experience a deep and ultimately restorative unity with one another, and with the sacred source of all that is? The renunciation—the letting-go—that Jesus exemplifies in the second two gospels is a wisdom-lesson for us all. As Buddha taught, clinging and attachment intensifies our suffering, while surrender and acceptance softens it so that we may move more readily into the knowing of our own essential natures as part and parcel of God.

The dying god motif is one of most ubiquitous archetypes in the world’s religions and mythologies. And here it is in its most potent iteration.

Holy Saturday, March 30

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

I know a man who lost his wife in a hiking accident. Both were experienced mountaineers. They were walking along a granite ridge between earth and sky when she slipped; in a moment she was gone.

Liminal spaces, sharing two worlds, can be beautiful and transformative, but they also hold dangers. The shore between land and sea; the forest on the edge of a grassy field; the twilight between day and darkness; the moment between breath and death; even the minutes and hours as we wait for a loved one's safe return: they all remind us of the transitional nature of our lives.

Holy Saturday, suspended between Christ's execution on a cross and His resurrection on Easter, is a profoundly liminal time. Even someone like me, with a relatively sheltered and safe life, can imagine the gut-hollow uncertainty the disciples felt. Jesus had been everything to them; but then he was gone. Perhaps on that interstitial Sabbath, they read Lamentations. Jeremiah cycles between his belief in the rightness of God's works, and the pain and suffering he witnesses. Afraid for their own lives, the disciples might have recited the 88th Psalm, titled 'A Petition to Be Saved from Death.' The psalmist begs God for wonders and lovingkindness, even while recognizing a world bordered with affliction and darkness.

The epistle to the Hebrews also acknowledges the shadowlands we inhabit: we have heard good news preached, but the word of God, sharper than any sword, could in a moment slice away our lives, our loved ones, our promised rest. We walk the border between joy in God and sinful disobedience because we ourselves are hybrid creatures: immortal souls like angels, but bottled in imperfect, mortal flesh.

Yet, the epistle reminds us, we have on our side Jesus, who shares with us the temptations of weak flesh. Having slipped from life to death and then to life again, Jesus extends to us mercy and love and hope. On this Holy Saturday we once more wait for Easter, to learn even death is only temporary.

Easter Day, March 31

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

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights.

Psalm 148 is a shout of pure joy from the heart of one who has been through the depths, has tasted the bitterness of death, and now sees how truly gracious the Lord is. The psalmist calls on every element of creation to praise the one who brought everything into being. On this day of resurrection, we can easily identify with this song of praise. In church today we will sing and shout Hallelujah at every opportunity, making up for the long fast from rejoicing that we observed during Lent.

The psalmist recalls for us the Genesis story of creation, calling first on the angelic co-creating host (we remember that God said, “Let US make ...”), then moving through the sources of light, the great waters, the denizens of the deep, the creeping things and all “cattle”, and culminating, like that initial creation, in human beings of all sorts and conditions; even the weather is summoned to sing the praises of the God who creates and re-creates, who makes light out of darkness and life out of death, who raises up the lowly and defeats the powerful. Today we celebrate God’s triumph over evil, as Jesus bursts from the tomb to proclaim that love has won the victory.

The surprising Gospel for this morning, the mighty prologue to John’s Gospel, also echoes that first creation story in its poetic statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jesus, the eternal Word, was with God in the beginning and is with us now, Jesus Christ the Alpha and Omega, the only Son of the Father, who lived and died and now has risen for our sake.

Today we rejoice, for the work of salvation has been accomplished and we are redeemed. We raise our voices in gratitude and praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, who was and is and is to come, the one who proves God’s eternal love for the whole creation. Hallelujah, Christ is risen; the Lord is risen indeed, Hallelujah!

Contributors

40 DAYS



L E N T

February 14: Rev. Richard Hogue
February 15: Jane Batarseh
February 16: Kris Hatch
February 17: Frank Borik
February 18: Rev. Tom Wilson
February 19: Stacey Klamman
February 20: Diane Lopez-Hughes
February 21: Carolyn Lief
February 22: Pat Kreder
February 23: Peter Bolland
February 24: Joyce Vogel
February 25: Rev. Vesta Kowalski
February 26: Mary Bowman
February 27: Calvin Johnson
February 28: Robert Heylmun
February 29: Rev. Peter Del Nagro
March 1: Kimberly Fernandez
March 2: Konnie Dadmun
March 3: Rev. Richard Lief
March 4: Phil Petrie
March 5: Blair Shamel
March 6: Kathleen Burgess
March 7: Ellen Hargus
March 8: David Spencer
March 9: Rev. Vesta Kowalski
March 10: Rev. Allisyn Thomas
March 11: Terry Kelly
March 12: John Will
March 13: Jacqueline FitzGibbon
March 14: Susan Jester
March 15: Peter Bolland

March 16: Joanna Airhart
March 17: Rev. Michael Kilpatrick
March 18: Stephanie Pierce
March 19: Don Mitchell
March 20: Beverly Edge
March 21: Kevin Lare
March 22: Frank Borik
March 23: Rev. Vesta Kowalski
March 24: Rev. Andrew Green
March 25: Danni Arregui
March 26: Deborah Kistler
March 27: Don Mitchell
March 28: Rev. Richard Hogue
March 29: Peter Bolland
March 30: Calvin Johnson
March 31: Dean Penny Bridges

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



STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Fridays, Feb. 16. – Mar. 22, 6 pm, in the Cathedral

Each Friday during Lent join us in the Cathedral for Stations of the Cross. Stations of the Cross is a contemplative spiritual practice in which participants walk around the Cathedral stopping at 14 sculptures which depict Jesus' last days on earth.



Palm Sunday, March 24

8 am – Liturgy of the Palms, Passion, and Eucharist in the Cathedral.

9:45 am – Procession, Liturgy of the Palms, Passion, and Eucharist in the Cathedral or worship online.

5 pm – Choral meditation on the Passion in the Cathedral or worship online.



Holy Wednesday, March 27

7 pm – Choral Tenebrae in the Cathedral or worship online.



Maundy Thursday, March 28

7 pm – Liturgy of the Day and Eucharist in the Cathedral or worship online.

8:30 pm – Vigil in the Chapel of the Holy Family

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Good Friday, March 29

12 pm – Choral Music and Meditations on the Passion in the Cathedral or worship online.

7 pm – Good Friday liturgy.



Holy Saturday, March 30

9 am – Holy Saturday liturgy in the Chapel of the Holy Family.

7:30 pm – Great Vigil of Easter, Bishop Susan will preside and preach in the Cathedral or worship online.



SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION, EASTER DAY

Sunday March 31

8 am – Holy Eucharist in the Cathedral with the Dean preaching.

10:30 am – Festival Eucharist with the Dean preaching in the Cathedral or worship online.

Cathedral Closed, Monday, April 1

St Paul's Cathedral – 40 Days of Lent 2024 – February 14 – March 31